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OR,

The Private Secretary's Oath.

A Story of the Sharks and Sharps of
New York.

BY CAPTAIN HOWARD HOLMES,
AUTHOR OF "FLASH DAN," "DENVER DUKE,"
"COOL CONRAD," "KEEN KENNARD," "MA-
JOR BLISTER," "CAPTAIN COLDGRIP,"
"FATHER FERRET," "LUCIFER
LYNX," "HAWKSPEAR,"
ETC., ETC.

CHAPTER I. CITY VULTURES.

A SMALL room, eight by ten, lighted by a
dirty lamp with a dirtier chimney, no carpet on
the floor, a battened window and a heavy door,
two chairs and a table.

There is a grate at one side of the room, but
it contains no fire, for the night is warm with-
in and without, and no artificial heat is needed.

Both the chairs are occupied.
The table stands squarely between them, and
the lamp-light struggles through the dingy

"YOU SEE THAT? ANOTHER ACT IN THE DARK PLAY, CAPTAIN FOX!"

chimney to fall upon two as unprepossessing faces as one would find in a day's travel.

The men have faces almost entirely covered by dark beards, over which their eyes—dark, keen eyes they are—peep with almost wolfish malignity.

One is a little better clad than the other, but his garments, good as they are, do not give him the look of a gentleman.

The room is in a quarter of New York where respectable people in good clothes do not congregate after a certain hour in the night.

It is not far from the East River. Indeed, one might stand on the roof of the house and cast a stone among the shipping.

"He isn't going to come," growled the better dressed man of the two, glancing at a fine gold watch which he took from his pocket. "Your bird has played you false. You'll have to hunt another."

The man across the table shook his head.

"He never fails," he answered, in tones of confidence, and then added: "I've known him too long for that. What says your time now?"

"It is just eleven."

"His time exactly."

The eager questioner was silent for a moment.

"You are sure he will not know me?"

"How can he in that layout?" replied the other, with a laugh. "My friend is a human hawk, and his eyes are the keenest of the keen, but he will not be able to look beneath your make-up. Ah! there he is!"

At that moment a peculiar knocking was heard, and the person who had last spoken crossed the room.

The man who remained at the table watched the proceedings with a great deal of interest.

His companion touched the door-knob and gave it a slight turn.

In a moment a duplicate knob on the other side of the door was treated in like manner; the portal was unlocked, and at once was pressed open, and a medium-sized man, well built and with an agile step, glided into the room.

He nodded pleasantly to the one who had admitted him, and then looked at the man at the table.

"Good-night, sir," saluted the new-comer removing a slouch hat which had cast the brow and eyes in shadow. "I hope I haven't kept ye waitin' on me, I do."

"Not at all," was the reply. "You keep your appointments very well, I am glad to say."

By this time the third man, had secured the door, and, as he strode up to the table, he touched the arm of the person he had admitted.

"This is Mr. Kit Kline," he said formally though awkwardly introducing the person touched to the individual at the table.

Mr. Kit Kline made a bow, which would have been ludicrous at any time or place.

"Kit and me know the ropes with all their knots and turns," continued the introducer, with a look of pride.

"Where's my chair?" the new-comer suddenly asked.

"Here," and the chair lately occupied by his friend was pushed toward him. "Now, sir, what is it you want?"

He addressed himself to the person at the end of the table.

"In the first place, Kit," put in the other, "Mr. Muggles wants to know that you're the right man."

"Oho! Muggles is it?" And a smile came to the speaker's lips. "Wants my credentials I suppose?"

"Sort o' that way."

"What did you tell him, Barry?"

"I thought I'd leave it to you."

"Well, I'm no fool!" cried Kit as if annoyed. "If he can't take your word for it, Barry, that I'll suit him, why, he can hunt another man."

"I'm willing to take Barry's word for it," spoke up Mr. Muggles; "but—but—"

"Still you'd like to have my pedigree, eh?" grinned Kit.

"Not that exactly—"

"But something nigh it. I understand, I think. Well, I was born a gentleman like a good many other people, and if I haven't played the role all along through life, it was because circumstances were ag'in' me. I don't look like a Broadway fashion-plate just now. I'm for use, not ornament, Mr. Muggles," and he leaned half way across the table as he repeated with a smile: "For use—for business, I say."

"That is all right," came the answer, and the speaker at the same time nodded to the man called Barry.

"What do you know about the Fidelity Trust Company?" he asked.

"Just as if I'm a living Stock Exchange!" laughed Kline, leaning back in his chair.

"I'm in earnest, Mr. Kline," resumed Mr. Muggles soberly.

"Well, I don't know much about it," he answered.

"Do you know that it will to-morrow receive certain documents for safe-keeping?"

"I don't know that."

"Well, that is the expectation. The Fidelity Trust Company is one of the best establishments of its kind in New York. Its boast is that it

has never lost a dollar's worth of property in transit, and I believe the boast does not exaggerate in the least. But to-morrow, sir, a certain package intended for the safes of the Fidelity must not reach them."

"The package which will not be large will reach the vicinity of the Fidelity about two o'clock to-morrow afternoon."

"Guarded?" asked Kit.

"Guarded by the person who will carry it—a young man not near your match in strength. Before we conclude this business I will give you an accurate description of the messenger, the direction from which he will approach, how he will carry the papers—everything. I want to know first whether you are averse to playing a little game of grab on the street in broad daylight, providing I make it interesting for you?"

"It's risky, with the cops and detectives about," was the answer. "Here o' late they swarm about the deposit buildings like bees. If I was to go down there to-morrow, dressed as I am, I'd be walked into the Rogues' Gallery and seated before the merciless camera there, before I could say 'Jack Robinson.' I know them, eh, Barry?"

Barry nodded, and Mr. Muggles went on:

"There is a risk, I'll admit," said he. "You need not watch for the messenger in your present garb, nor where the private detectives congregate. Both you and Barry will be furnished with clothes suited to the little game. All I want to know is whether I can depend on you."

"For how much?"

Mr. Muggles turned to Barry and nodded.

"Mr. Muggles says five each, if successful," that individual informed Kit.

"Five ones, eh?"

"Yes."

"That is if we get the package; Sing Sing if we fail."

Kit shrugged his shoulders, and turning to Mr. Muggles, who was watching him, he asked:

"Do you know what Sing Sing means?"

"I think I do."

"And you offer us five hundred to run the risk of going there for twenty years each?"

"But men like you don't fail."

"We don't, hey? They wouldn't need prisons in this country if that was the case. If all men like me succeeded in everything they undertook, what would be he use o' courts and police?"

"Kit's got it dead to rights, Mr. Muggles," added Barry, who sat on the edge of the table, with his big dark hands resting on his knees.

"I'll add another hundred, but I want the work well done," was the response.

Both Barry and Kit were silent for a moment.

"Where does the messenger start from, did you say?" asked Kline, at length.

"I did not say," Muggles answered, with a smile. "He will appear near the door of the Fidelity, coming from the North about two o'clock in the afternoon."

"We don't want to meet him right under the eyes of the cops and the secrets; you ought to know that!"

"Of course not."

"If we knew where he was to start from we could avoid a good deal of the risk, and render the catch more certain."

"You might watch for him at the corner of Wall and Broadway."

"Too public," demurred Kit, shaking his head.

"Then at Broadway and Pine."

"On which side?"

"The left."

"What will he be like, and how dressed?"

"He is a well-built young man; age, twenty-three. He will wear to-morrow a light-brown coat with pantaloons to match, an open collar, a light cravat, dotted with purple, a brown hat of soft straw, with a wide band."

"Any mustache?"

"Yes; his mustache will be the color of his hat."

"I guess we'll know him, Barry?" and Kit glanced at his friend.

"I'd know 'im in a million."

"Who's to get the package if we succeed?"

"I, of course."

"Where will you be?"

"Barry knows all that."

"All right," assented Kit. "I guess the bargain is a bargain. What are we going to seal it with?"

The appeal was not in vain.

Barry got upon the table at the risk of knocking the lamps off, and knocked on the smoked ceiling with his knuckles.

"What is it?" came in faint voice down from above.

"A bottle and three glasses."

Very soon there was the sound of feet, and as Barry held the door open, in walked a woman, bearing in her hands a tray and the things which had been ordered.

She was a perfect Amazon, and from the moment when she crossed the threshold the eyes of two of the men became fastened upon her.

Her face was almost the color of old gold, and her enormous arms, bared to the elbows,

looked like the weapons of a champion of the ring.

The woman would have been handsome if she had not been so large.

Placing the tray on the table, she walked out without a word.

The eyes of Kline followed her.

"In fortune's name, who is that?" he exclaimed, turning suddenly upon Barry.

"That? Oh, that is Mag Manacle."

"I thought so; but I never expected to see her here."

"You know her, then?" asked Mr. Muggles.

"Yes," and Kit leaned across the table again.

"I've seen her before—no difference where!"

CHAPTER II.

MAG AND HER VISITOR.

It was twelve o'clock—midnight—when the little party in the eight-by-ten room broke up.

They left the house one by one, leaving an empty bottle and three glasses on the table under the dirty lamp, and their figures soon vanished among the shadows of the street.

By and by the door of the conspirators' room opened, and the giantess entered.

"The birds are gone, hey?" laughed the woman, and her tones were not as unmusical as one would have thought. "Three aces like them would help almost any hand out. I knew Barry Black the moment I set eyes on him, but I had to look the second time before I got onto the one who came in at the eleventh hour. I did not know he was in the city, though he's liable to turn up anywhere and at any time. Didn't know me, did he? I guess not, though he stared pretty hard. The other man—the one who sat at the end of the table—I did not know at all, though I'd stake a good deal if I had it that he ain't used to the clothes he wore to-night. Barry and Kit Kline are in the employ of that man, and something's in the wind. Kit Kline! That's a good name for a bird like him!"

While the woman thus cogitated, she placed bottle and glasses on the tray, turned the lamp down a little and marched out of the room.

If there was a better place in New York for a rogue's council than Mag Manacle's den, it was not known.

There were other apartments in the house where men could meet, and where they did congregate, but the eight-by-ten room was set apart for private business.

All one had to do to secure the room was to communicate with the proprietress, and to cover her palm with an extra fee.

Big Mag never blackmailed any of her customers, but she made it a point to know something about every one who visited her rooms, and a new one like Mr. Muggles, was apt to excite her curiosity—as in this case.

Mag kept her liquors in a room directly above the secret chamber, and in an almost burglar-proof cupboard to which she alone carried the key.

When she went back to her treasury of fluids, she put the empty bottle away and was locking the door, when a footstep startled her.

Big Mag turned quickly and fiercely to find herself face to face with Kit Kline; but, seeing who it was, her hard features softened, and with a smile which always brought back in a degree the good looks of better days, she said:

"I did not know you were in the city, Kit. Why haven't you called on me before?"

"On you? Great Caesar! I'd like to know why I should resume our acquaintance?" and he dropped into a chair, frowning.

"It's been some time, Kit—some time since," continued the woman.

"Hang it all, yes," was the answer which was spoken in no good-humor.

"Let me see. I believe it was in January that—"

"In January!" broke in Kit. "I'll admit the whole thing without the telling."

Big Mag seemed to take delight in torturing the man.

"That's not your natural beard, Kit."

"Woman, by heaven you're a regular Hecate!" he cried. "Do you want me to show you what I really look like?"

"Just as you like."

Kit swept the room with a quick but searching glance; then, as if satisfied, he put one hand to his face and jerked his whiskers off.

Mag Manacle stared at the smooth round face with the two deep-set little black eyes that confronted her.

It was for all the world the face of a shrewd criminal and a dangerous man. Kit Kline did not need the garb of a prison to set upon him the seal of sin.

His face, cold, merciless and hard, revealed the man with heart of adamant.

For some seconds he looked at Mag, leaning slightly forward in the chair, and holding the discarded beard in one hand.

"Put it on again," ordered the woman at last, and Kit readjusted the disguise in a moment.

"How long have you been here?" he asked.

"Ever since."

"You've changed your name, I see," he went on.

"So have you."

"Don't the Secrets know where you are?"

"What if they do?" demanded the Amazon, with a gesture of disdain. "They're not going to molest a person so long as that person is trying to make an honest living."

A contemptuous expression came into Kline's sinister eyes.

"Are you really doing well here, Mag?" he asked.

"I'm not starving," was the reply.

"I thought not. But, have you more than you want?"

Big Mag looked at the speaker with a strangeness that puzzled him.

"You are driving at something; I know your ways," she said with a smile. "What do you want, Kit?"

"It's not much, Mag—only enough for present need; and I'll pay you back with interest to-morrow night," was the answer.

"How much is it?"

"Twenty."

Without hesitancy Mag thrust one of her big hands into a capacious pocket and took out a quantity of gold and silver.

Selecting from among the lot four yellow pieces she put the rest back, and looked at Kit Kline who had not lost a particle of this proceeding.

"I don't lend money," she suddenly reminded him; "you can borrow elsewhere. You need not come to me with anything to-morrow night. Here are your twenty dollars. No thanks, if you please. Thanks are interest paid before hand. Don't mention it."

She did not touch Kit's hand in handing him the money, but dropped the pieces into his palm one after another from thumb and finger.

"If you refuse thanks I'll withhold them, of course," the man responded.

"I don't want 'em," retorted the woman.

Kit dropped it into his pocket, as he asked:

"Did you know me down-stairs, to-night?"

"Of course I did!"

"What thought popped into your head when you saw it was I?"

"I thought of the last time I saw you."

"That was—"

"The day you made your big break for liberty."

Instantly a scowl settled over Kline's hard features. His eyes seemed to dart lightning at the woman before him.

"If it hadn't been for you, that day, I would have succeeded!" he growled. "How did they reward you?"

"Not at all."

"I heard that your action shortened your term."

"Not by a single hour. I guess you'll never forgive me, Kit?" And Mag Manacle laughed a little.

"So you thought of that when you ran against me to-night?"

"I couldn't help it, you see."

"Well, let's drop it," and he arose as if to depart. "You've got a good place here," he said, patronizingly. "It's not a bad thing to stand in with the cops and the sleuths."

"I don't. They let me alone; that's all."

"A sort o' silent agreement. I see!" grinned Kit, and then he took a step toward the door.

Mag followed him to the threshold, her Amazonian figure enormously large when contrasted with his slight form.

"Good-night, Mag," he said, pausing at the door. "Thank you. I can find my way out. You have been very kind. I—"

"No thanks, I told you," broke in the woman, and then she added a "good-night" which left him without an excuse for saying another word.

A singular look, half-smile, half-frown, settled over the dark face of Mag Manacle while she stood at the door and heard her unwelcome visitor go down the steps to the street.

"I know what he thinks," she decided, turning back, but not without locking the door. "He flatters himself that he will get a hold on me, but he will find himself mistaken. Let him try to fasten on me—let him attempt to pay me back for choking him in the prison-yard, and I'll crush him like that!"

And Mag Manacle's foot came down upon a spider which had caught her eye on the floor, and crushed out its life.

CHAPTER III.

IN DISGUISE.

ABOUT the time the events just described were transpiring, a man was engaged in watching the passengers who were almost continually alighting under the electric lights of the Hudson River Depot.

He had an eye that appeared able to see a person all over at a glance, and not one of the many who left the cars escaped his notice.

In person this man was apparently past fifty. He was plainly dressed, but there was the look of a real gentleman about him. He might have been a well-to-do business man who was expecting some one on one of the numerous trains.

He was not perplexed when he had watched a

long time without seeing anybody whom he seemed to recognize.

Only once or twice he gave any person a second look; he dismissed them with a first scrutiny, but that was a good one.

When a train had unloaded he would go back to the main waiting-room and wait there until another steamed into the station.

At last he stepped up to the ticket office and put a question in quiet tones:

"That train is fifteen minutes late," replied the man behind the window, and the stranger bowed his thanks and withdrew.

He went back to the benches and amused himself looking at the people under the electric burners.

Presently he walked away, and with a nod to the keeper of the gate passed on as a train pulled into the depot.

It was the late train on the "New York Central."

Selecting a good position the quiet man began to watch the passengers as they alighted. Men, women and children passed him like an endless caravan.

Among them was an individual whose long, old-fashioned coat and hat, with the carpet-bag, long out of date, stamped him as being a citizen of the rural districts.

He blustered along like a person in a hurry with very few minutes in which to catch a boat or bus.

A quiet smile appeared on the face of the watcher when his eyes alighted on this traveler. He stepped nearer unobserved and got a closer view.

"Aida would laugh to see that old fellow," chuckled the observer, while he followed his quarry through the depot into the street. "I shall describe him to her when I see her again. But, for the present, I have other work on hand."

Meanwhile the new arrival was some distance from the building.

He had run the gantlet of cabmen in safety, and still clung to the carpet-bag as if it contained inestimable treasure.

Almost suddenly the passenger disappeared. He stepped around a near corner and vanished. It appeared as though the great city had already swallowed him up, carpet-bag and all. He had come to New York possibly from a pleasant home among the Jersey hills; had he gone to join the caravan of missing men?

As for the person who had watched and followed him, he, too, had disappeared just as effectually.

Half an hour later the watcher at the station entered a very quiet and cosy room on Broadway, and turned on the gas.

His footsteps seemed to rouse an individual stretched on an office settee, and the next moment the man just from the street was laughing.

"You must have found something funny to-night," remarked the occupant of the settee.

"I did, Sam—something to me decidedly funny."

"Where was it?"

"At the Hudson River Depot."

"Oh!" And the exclamation was followed by a sort of whistle. "I recollect now that you were going there before you came back. So you saw something diverting? I wish I could, once in a while."

The speaker sat up on the settee, and taking a cigar from his pocket, lit it and began to smoke contentedly.

"Who's been here, Sam?" asked the other, presently.

"No one."

"Not the little girl?"

"No, sir."

The questioner had crossed the room to a desk, which he unlocked, and from which he drew a pair of bright handcuffs.

They were delicate but strong, and as he transferred them to his pocket their surface caught the gleam of the light above his head.

The eyes of the man called Sam saw the "bracelets," but he did not interpose a question.

"Do you know Peter Primrose, Sam?" was suddenly asked.

"No, sir," and then the same quiet, unexcited voice added: "From where?"

"I should say, probably from Greenhorn Valley," was the answer.

"I don't know him, sir."

All at once a queer look passed between the two men.

"You are giving me a game of talk," suddenly asserted Sam.

"Did you see Peter Primrose at the depot, captain?"

"Ha! ha! I thought you would catch on, Sam!" laughed the other. "If I did not see the original Peter, I saw a man who would pass readily for him. He came by the late train."

"He was your man, eh?"

"My man!—the person for whom I've been hanging round the Hudson River Depot ever since seven o'clock. He came with the stamp of hayseed all over him; he carried a carpet-bag which did duty for somebody's grandfather nearly a century ago. In short, he was a first-

class Peter Primrose, from Simplicity's Cross-Roads, or some similar location."

"Of course you spotted him?"

"Certainly. I would not for the world permit a simple countryman to walk through the snares of New York after dark unguarded. It was my duty to not lose sight of Peter till he had reached his journey's end."

"Good. Of course he did not know he had such a friend and protector near."

"If he did, Sam, he never let on."

A few moments of silence ensued. The man on the settee smoked his cigar in quiet while the watcher of the depot seemed to count the figures on the curtain half-pulled down.

"You must go down-town," the shadow from the station said at last to his companion.

For answer, Sam crossed the room and took a hat from a peg.

"You will go up the steps leading into Number — Wall street."

Sam bowed.

"That is the stairway to the rooms above the the Fidelity Trust Company."

"You are right, Sam."

"Well, I am ready," and Sam stood equipped for departure save that he held his hat in one hand.

"You will go to the third floor," continued the other. "Once there you will turn to the left and traverse the corridor to the end. The door there will be locked and the hall will be dark. You will not strike a match, but you will feel along the door, up the panel near the hinges till you find a little button."

The speaker stopped as if he had reached the end of his instructions.

Sam waited quietly.

"When you have pressed the button a slide will fall," the detective resumed. "Then you will drop into the room *this*."

At the same moment Sam saw extended toward him a small packet neatly folded like a billet.

He took it and held it in his hand while he waited for further orders.

But none came.

"I'll do all this, captain, to the letter," remarked Sam, at length.

"All right."

"Shall I report when I am through?"

"No. I wouldn't be here to hear it," was the response. "You can have the night to yourself when you have dropped the message. I will see you to-morrow, some time," and, as Sam turned to depart he saw the hand-cuffs shining in the light again.

There was no movement by the man left in the room for some time after the messenger's departure.

"One wouldn't think that the man I have just sent out is one of the keenest ferrets in New York. I would be willing to send him around the world on the heels of the shrewdest villain out of durance. He knows nothing but obedience; he never loses a trail, and never makes a mistake. The possessor of a thousand disguises, and the master of them all, he is still unknown to the people of New York. Sam Sharp's name never gets into the papers in connection with good detective work. I am forced to take some of the laurels that belong to him, but, one of these days—at the end of this trail, maybe—the world will hear of Sam the Silent Hound of Gotham. Now, my friend, who came in from Way Back to-night, I'll play a little hand that'll operate against some of your plans. There was more in your valise to-night than the world dreams of. I think I'm the only person outside the deal who knows that the coolest and biggest villain in America came in awhile ago to play one of his mysterious hands."

The detective held the polished handcuffs up in the light and admired their mechanism with a smile.

They were of a new pattern, light but strong, and as he shook them, he exclaimed:

"Nobody knows that the man who made those bracelets is Sam Sharpe, my office-man. One of these days—Ha, ha! I'm always saying that. Confound it all! What am I doing here while Sam is attending to business like a faithful servitor? I am wanted elsewhere. It is not too late," and he glanced at his watch as he turned toward the door.

On the street below he paused a moment and looked both ways—up Broadway and down.

"That is the man we want to look out for to-morrow," whispered one of two men as he caught his companion's arm and designated the detective by a secret gesture.

"Who is that, Barry?"

"That! Why, sir, that is Phil Fox, the best man-hound in all this city. Whatever we do, we don't want 'em to put him on the trail."

The man who heard these words seemed to lean forward while he watched the detective with great curiosity.

"Phil Fox, eh?" he muttered. "Will he wear the same clothes to-morrow, Barry?"

"That depends. But, whether he does or not, we're not apt to see him. What I was saying was, that we don't want him on the trail."

The other man made no reply, but held out his hand and shut it savagely as he clinched his teeth.

CHAPTER IV.

AIDA.

"THE foxes are under cover by this time, and I must be at work," said Phil Fox, the detective, to himself, as he started up Broadway.

If he had known that the two men—Barry Black, sometimes called Black Barry, and Kit Kline, had watched him, he might have changed his mind for the present; but, as it was, he was not aware that the eyes of these slimy sharks had spied him.

The detective, who was known among his associates as the Gentleman Spotter, took an Elevated car before he had gone far, and rode almost to the Battery.

When he alighted he passed into a large building near the "L" depot, and up two flights of stairs to the third floor.

If Phil Fox was going to snap the shining handcuffs on any one, he was proceeding about it complacently, just as if the wrists were waiting for the toils.

He knocked at a door, beyond which not a single ray of light was seen, for the door had no transom, and no key-hole, either, as far as could be observed.

But the noise of a sewing-machine at work came from beyond the portal. It stopped quickly when the detective rapped.

In a moment footsteps came toward the door, then a bolt shot back, and the shadow-sport confronted a young girl, who greeted him with a smile.

She was rather tall, with a fine figure, a graceful carriage, and strikingly beautiful. There was something unusually expressive in her large, dark eyes, and her welcome told that she was glad to see the detective, even though the hour was late for a call.

The room itself was neatly though tastefully furnished. The scanty means of one who was compelled to run a machine into the night had arranged a few ornaments so as to make a pleasant showing, and the girl, who was not past nineteen, seemed proud of her elevated abode.

The gas was turned a little higher over the machine, and the unfinished work that incumbered it, and the detective took the chair the girl drew from the wall and placed near her work-table.

"Well, Aida, the vultures and buzzards are gathering," began Phil Fox.

"What! have more come?" exclaimed the girl.

"One came in a little while ago."

"By rail?"

"By rail," was the echo, and a smile began to play over the detective's face. "I wish you could have seen him," he went on.

"Was he worth looking at?"

"He was, indeed! An old gray coat with colonial brass buttons, a crushed beaver hat, baggy pantaloons, and an old-fashioned carpet-bag—not a valise, mind you, Aida."

The girl smiled, showing her beautiful teeth, and lighting up her fine eyes with vivacity.

"So the man you have described is one of the vultures?" she went on.

"He is indeed one of them."

"The others—"

"Oh, they are already here, you know."

"So you have told me."

"So they are, Aida."

The girl was silent a little while.

"What news have you of him?" she suddenly asked.

"He is no better."

"Will he die to-night?"

"I don't know."

In an instant an almost deathly pallor chased all color from the girl's face.

"It is the vengeance of eternal justice!" she exclaimed, and the eyes seemed to blaze in their depths. "It may be wrong to wish any one trouble and pain, Phil, but when I think of that man and the past, I can't give him a breath of sympathy. The vengeance of Heaven overtakes the guilty in the end. The mills of the gods grind slowly, you know, but they crush all the grist in the end—they grind every grain. You don't know whether he will live through the night or not. What do the doctors say?"

"They expect him to finish his course before morning, but even doctors miss it sometimes."

"Of course. The vultures, then, are gathering before the carcass is ripe for their talons. They are determined to be on the field when it comes to be picked."

The girl spoke with mingled sarcasm and bitterness.

"I wish I could stand at his bedside and have his ear for a minute," she went on, with scarcely a pause after her last sentence. "No, it wouldn't do, after all. I would make a scene which would get into the papers. I don't want it there. I prefer to live in obscurity, here, in this little room—running my machine at night—rather than appear in public connected with such a drama of mystery, misery and crime. My mother—" and here the girl's glance wandered to a neatly-framed portrait on the wall over against her machine. "My mother was not permitted to live to witness the triumph of justice and the vengeance of time. She wouldn't touch one of his dollars for the world. Why

should she? There is a stain on everything he holds in his dying grip. May it follow him to the grave! That is harsh, coming from a woman's lips, but I can't help it. Heaven pardon me if I am wrong; but, the man dying in his elegant mansion to-night deserves no blessing at the hands of any living creature."

"You forget Tully Trenck."

"Tully Trenck!" cried the girl, in a voice that was not an echo but rather an ejaculation. "I did not think of the man who is to profit by the death in the avenue mansion. Is he there now, Phil?"

"No. Tully Trenck is supposed to be out of the city. They don't know where to reach him. He may not come back till after Musgrave has been buried. So they say, at all events."

"When he comes back he will find himself rich?"

"He thinks so."

"Don't you, Phil?"

Aida leaned toward the detective and watched him curiously.

"No, Aida. Monckton Musgrave has deceived Tully Trenck in his will. The man who expects thousands won't get tens."

The girl drew back and gave utterance to a strange cry.

"I can hardly believe that," she exclaimed. "Those two men have been great friends. They have plotted and schemed together for a quarter of a century; they were at it before I was born. They have reaped more ill-gotten harvests than any two other men in New York. They did not scruple at any thing that promised to add to their wealth. They trampled down everything in their path and turned aside for nothing. Their motto seemed to be 'crush and reap,' and they lived it to the letter."

"All that is true, Aida."

"True, and yet you tell me that Monckton Musgrave gives none of his wealth to his companion in plot and crime?"

"I have told you so."

"It is beyond me," said the girl with a gesture. "Why, the lives of those two men have ran together for twenty-five years. What can have separated them at the last moment?"

"Retribution."

The sewing girl started forward at mention of the word.

"Does he hope—"

Her eyes fell upon her mother's portrait again and she stopped.

"I don't know what he hopes; but I know that his papers when opened will be a surprise to the city."

"And to Tully Trenck most of all from what you have told me."

"Yes."

"You detectives find out a great deal," added Aida. "You know much about family histories and private lives. I don't ask you what you know about Monckton Musgrave's will. You have your secrets, upon which I do not wish to intrude. You know it; that is enough."

Phil Fox looked at the girl for a moment, and then bent forward and laid his hand on one corner of the machine near her work.

"Aida, would you take that which your mother refused in her lifetime?" he asked.

The girl started.

"Do you mean—"

She caught herself and stared at him.

"Do you mean that he has made reparation at last?" she cried, with an effort.

"He has."

In a moment Aida was on her feet, her fine figure drawn to its true height, and her eyes again in a blaze.

"Not a dollar of his wealth," she went on, looking at the detective regarding her in speechless astonishment from the chair. "My mother refused more than once to subsist on his reluctant charity, and I will not do it now. His gold is accursed! It has been wrung from the poor, it has been earned at the cost of life and happiness. He sent my mother to the grave before her time, and now, in order to make his peace with an avenging God, he throws to me the harvest of crime. No!"

"But, Aida, the world will think none the less of you for taking it," answered the detective, speaking calmly. "Don't you see that the legacy will proclaim to the world that your mother was in the right? It will brush every stain from her name—"

"Will it do that?" cried the girl, eagerly, and she almost touched him with her lovely face.

"Do you say that my acceptance of a legacy from Monckton Musgrave will carry with it a removal of the only stain that rests to-day on my mother's sacred name?"

"It will, Aida."

"Then I will take the reward of guilt. Then I will receive the gold of the man who is dying in the up-town palace to-night."

"I thought you would," was the reply.

"But, how do you know all this, Phil?"

The detective smiled at the question, one of the most natural in the world.

"I will impart a secret, Aida," said he. "For three months I have been a frequent visitor at Monckton Musgrave's house without my calling being suspected. I have watched the man moving

slowly to the tomb with a mysterious disease which no human skill can arrest. I have seen him burn one will and write another. I know the contents of the last paper; those of the first I can guess at. To-morrow the last will quits his house, whether he be alive or dead. It will be taken to one of the safe-deposit vaults where valuable papers are kept, and at a certain time it will be taken out and made public."

"Who takes it to the vaults? Are you the messenger, Phil?"

"No. Monckton Musgrave's private secretary does this work."

"Is it risky?"

"Oh, no," assured the detective. "No one outside of the house knows that the will, with a few other papers, are to be carried to the Trust Company. The young man is honest, and all will go well."

"At last!" exclaimed Aida, the sewing-girl, and her glance wandered once more to the portrait on the wall. "It was a long time coming, mother, but reparation is here."

"You will sleep well to-night, Aida," laughed Phil Fox. "I could not help breaking this news before I complete a little job I have on hand. It is something of this kind," and he drew the bright handcuffs from his pocket and held them up before the girl's eyes.

"Is the work dangerous?" she asked, with a start.

"No," smiled he. "I have only to walk up to a man and clap these on. I've done it before, Aida. Now, good-night."

The following moment the sewing-girl was alone, and she was listening strangely to the steps of the gentleman sleuth as they went down stairs.

CHAPTER V.

TOILS OF STEEL.

PHIL FOX had use for the polished handcuffs whose ingenious mechanism had found birth in Sam Sharpe's brain.

The dangerous fraternity knew that when they once encircled their wrists, there was no getting loose—no wriggling out of the steel toils.

Sleek villains with effeminate hands had laughed at the old style "darbies," but here was an invention that made them curse the man who was the supposed inventor—Phil Fox, spotter and sport.

With the manacles in his pocket, the detective went down the stairs from Aida's somewhat elevated abode.

"She won't go back to the needle any more to-night, I'm thinking," and Phil smiled as he thought out the sentence. "I've filled her head with too much astonishment for that. I knew she would at first refuse to touch a dollar of Monckton Musgrave's money, because of the injury he did her mother, but I had an idea I could put the matter before her in a light that would bring about a change of resolution. Aida is a sensible girl, and she knows that while she takes the legacy, she will not be required to call Musgrave a saint."

Phil Fox laughed to himself at the finish of his little speech, but he suddenly became serious and quickened his gait.

"Sam has dropped the message through the door by this time, but I have not bagged my man," he went on presently. "I told Aida that all I had to do was to walk up to him and clap the bracelets on. He may show his teeth—I did not tell her that."

The New York detective did not make another halt till he had passed beyond the door of a house in which we gave the reader his first introduction to several of our characters.

Mag Manacle had not retired.

It was seldom that the giantess went to bed before daylight, when a younger woman known as her sister went on duty.

Phil Fox climbed the steps that led to Mag's own room, and gave three peculiar taps on the door.

It was opened by the portress and proprietress in person.

The detective walked in.

"You are a little late, or early," said Mag, smiling as she glanced at the clock on the mantle.

"I don't know. Is he here?"

The woman nodded.

"What is he doing?"

"He is asleep," and Mag's looks wandered to the floor where a little dark spot showed where she had crushed the spider after Kit Kline's departure.

Phil understood the look.

"Do you want him now?" she asked suddenly looking up.

"That is what I came for."

"No man has ever been arrested in my house for a crime like that."

"You don't want him taken here?"

"If my customers come here to be arrested, you see I will soon have none at all," she replied in solicitous tones. "I don't mean that I want to stand between that man and his crime, nor between the deed and its punishment. I do not."

"How long has he been asleep, Mag?"

"Nearly an hour."

"Is he in liquor?"

"Not enough to make him sleep long, but enough to make him troublesome under some circumstances."

"Is the door locked?"

"No."

The detective left the chair which he had taken, but before he could take a step toward the door, the big hand of Mag fell upon his arm with the lightness of a snowflake almost.

"You know where his haunts are," said she, looking into the man-hunter's face. "Let me turn him out gently. He will go straight to his place. He always does that when turned out of a place like this, they tell me. I am Mag Manacle, and you know my past; but for all that, I have a certain reputation to lose."

"Very well; you may dismiss the man in the room below. I will run the risk elsewhere; but he has had string enough, and I have a little duty to perform. I'll look in upon him first, Mag."

"Of course."

In a short time Phil Fox, the detective, and Mag Manacle went down to the floor beneath.

The door of the eight-by-ten room, where we lately saw Barry Black and Kit Kline in consultation with Mr. Muggles, was tight shut, but not locked.

Mag turned the knob without noise, and then motioned to the sleuth.

Phil stepped forward and pushed the door open.

He saw first that the lamp—the dirty one with the dirty chimney—was burning in the apartment. Then he opened the portal still more, and stepped inside.

The succeeding moment he saw the table that stood in the middle of the room, but he saw also a man sitting bolt upright in a chair, with his eyes wide open and fixed upon him!

The man left asleep by Mag some time before was no longer so.

He seemed to recognize the detective in a glance.

All at once he darted up, throwing back the chair as he did so, and, in a flash, he was bounding across the cramped room with the ferocity of a tiger and straight as a marksman's bullet at the gentleman shadow.

Big Mag saw enough of this through a crack to let her throw her burly figure out of sight; then came a terrific collision, for Phil Fox had hurriedly placed himself in a position to receive the assault.

A very tiger was in the blood and muscle of the man who was to have been taken quietly, and the proprietress of the den had a cry driven from her throat as Phil Fox went against the wall with a crash.

"In my house! Great heavens! Why did I let him fall asleep here?" she exclaimed. "I knew they wanted him for the crime. I might have expected a visit from the man who has come. If it had been Kit Kline, or the man who calls himself such, I would not care so much; but this fellow—a good customer—"

She stopped for breath.

Meantime the noise of a desperate struggle going on inside filled her ears.

All at once something fell heavily on the floor, and, after a second's silence, a man came out of the room.

Mag still stood speechless in the corridor.

"Run! run!" she exclaimed, springing to the man's side. "It wasn't my fault—"

She checked herself and gasped.

She was talking to Phil Fox, the city shadow!

"It's all right, Mag," laughed the sport. "A case of mistaken identity—nothing more."

"Where is he?"

"In there with the grips on," was the reply.

Big Mag did not go forward, but remained in her tracks content to take the detective's statement without question.

"Go back and let me manage my man unless you want him to see you here," continued Phil. "I shall tell him that you are no way responsible for his capture. He is tractable now."

With a parting glance toward the door the Amazon disappeared, and the New York sleuth went back to his prisoner.

There was now a forced twinkle in the eyes that met his as he set foot beyond the threshold.

"The woman plays double, eh?" he said.

"The woman played not at all in this case," was the quick response.

"Eh?"

"Mag Manacle betrays nobody. You ought to know that," and Phil coolly met the eye that was watching him like a hawk's. "We generally run men down by following the clues we pick up. Come, Bobolink."

The man who was reclining on the floor where he had fallen, after receiving the handcuffs, got up with alacrity and stepped forward.

"What is this for?" he asked suddenly stepping in front of the detective.

"For the last winter's job."

"The diamonds, eh?"

"Yes."

"Did it take you six months to work the clew, Phil Fox?"

"What if it did? I have my man, you see."

There was no answer by the prisoner, and

neither of the men spoke another word until they were fairly away from Mag's, going down the almost deserted street under the lamps.

"I might have known he would give me away," suddenly growled Bobolink, which, as the reader has suspected, ere this, was but a nickname.

"Do you think he did?" smiled the detective. "I know it. Why, I could have thrown him to the cops once to-night, and in Mag's house, too."

"Why didn't you?"

"Because I thought then he was not going to give me over to you."

"After this, Bobolink, you will know what to do."

The first two words had a singular sound for the man under arrest.

He turned his face to the detective's and seemed to study it for a moment.

"I cut loose from him from this moment!" he exclaimed. "Why, sir, to-night in the very room where you caught me, and inside o' two hours, sat three men at that same table. I didn't see 'em, but don't I know they were there? Ah, don't I?" And he laughed till his teeth shook like castanets.

"One was Black Barry in no disguise," he went on. "The other—the man who came in with Barry—was a person called Muggles, though that's no more his name than Gabriel is mine. He's not used to society like that o' Barry, though he looked like one o' us, to-night. I don't mention him, mind you, Phil Fox, because I've got a future, and Bobolink is no fool. The third man is the scamp I'm coming to. Called himself Kit, to-night. I wonder if he wears on his throat the marks Mag Manacle left there when she grasped him in the prison yard a few years ago?"

The detective gave the man a quiet smile.

"So you think you saw Diamond Dunn to-night, do you?" he asked.

"I know I did!" emphasized the man in irony. "What them three men talked about in Mag's little room is not for me to say, for I don't know. Now I guess I'm even with the bogus Kit Kline for putting you onto me. And why? Because once I refused to give him the lion's share for doing a jackal's work."

Phil Fox made no answer, but he thought.

"I caught more than a common diamond thief to-night. I have been put on the trail of a great conspiracy, one that will give me employment for a spell. Mag knows something about the conference, but I don't ask her to betray her customers. I'll go to the end myself. Black Barry and Diamond Dunn, alias Kit Kline, and another man, name unknown. To-morrow I will know more."

Yes, on the morrow he would know more, for the city was to be thrown into a state of excitement by a crime something out of the usual run of such things, and one which was destined to take him, the gentleman sport and spotter of Gotham, through a labyrinth of mystery, danger and death.

Truly he could say that he had caught "more than Bobolink."

CHAPTER VI.

A DEATH BLOW.

It was nearing two o'clock in the afternoon and the city in the vicinity of Broadway and Pine was in its usual state of bustle.

The private detectives whose duties it is to watch the messengers who flit about this hour between the safe deposit vaults and the banks seemed to have nothing particular to do.

The hour had not quite arrived when they were expected to keep their eyes wide open, and to closely inspect every person who came within their line of vision.

It was a warm day, and the heat had driven hundreds to the shadows of the tall buildings.

All at once the strokes of a clock proclaimed the hour of two, and scarcely had the last reverberation died away ere a man came down Pine and stopped on the pavement of Broadway.

This person was ordinarily dressed, and his appearance would not have attracted especial attention anywhere.

In a moment he was elbowed by a man who reached the junction of the two streets almost simultaneously with him, and as the latter passed on, going down Broadway, he whispered covertly:

"Be ready. The game is coming!"

Instinctively, as it were, the man who had come out of Pine street glanced up the great artery of New York.

He would have good eyes if he could single out from all the pedestrians passing down upon him any particular person, yet he appeared to do so.

He stepped back toward the buildings and sent a swift glance in the direction taken by the man who had just whispered the warning.

Did he see that that person had come back and was standing barely ten feet away watching the crowd coming down from the north?

Suddenly the space between the two men was closed, they stood together, and both were eying the same party.

The object of their espionage was a young

man of about twenty-three, dressed in brown, with a brown straw hat with a wide band. He was good looking and well built, and his mouth was shaded by a glossy, well-kept mustache.

The coat was unbuttoned with the exception of the top button on the breast.

The two men said nothing while they stood there together.

He stopped for a moment and look at a display of meerschaum pipes in a window, and this gave the watchers time to look him over in good shape.

As he turned from the window the hawks separated a little, but not until one had said to the other:

"Make no mistake."

The response had been a slight nod, and then the prey was on hand.

As the youth struck the opening of Pine street he was suddenly grasped by a pair of hands that closed on his arms like eagle talons, and in a flash he was held as in a grip of steel.

At the same time other hands loosened the one button on the breast, and the contents of an inner pocket were jerked out in the twinkling of an eye!

The mouth of the victim was not covered during these proceedings, but so quickly were they done that he had no time to sound an alarm.

Among the many people on the spot but few noticed or were aware of the assault and robbery, and the two villains were out of sight before the young man announced his loss.

The bold play seemed to have taken his breath, but when he recovered he sounded the alarm.

At first some people were inclined to disbelieve his statements.

"What did you lose?" asked a policeman, who hustled up and took charge of matters.

"Valuable papers, sir."

"You were taking them—"

"To the vaults of the Fidelity Trust Company."

"For—"

"For Monckton Musgrave, a gentleman now on his death-bed."

"Who assaulted you?"

"Two men. While one held me up, the other took the package."

"It was beneath your coat, eh?"

"Yes, sir," and the young man opened his coat and displayed an empty pocket to the policeman and the crowd.

"Did the packet contain money?"

"It contained a big fortune."

"If it was from Monckton Musgrave it was a bonanza sure. I know him," said some one in the crowd as he walked away.

At this moment the policeman espied a plainly dressed gentleman to whom he turned the young man over.

"This gentleman is Mr. Bryce—a 'private,' he said, and Mr. Bryce at once put forward the impression that he had but to hear of a crime to put out his hand and nab the perpetrators.

Baldimore Bryce was a free lance in the detective field. He was well-known to the officers who serve on Wall street and the nearest part of Broadway, and but few of them entertained a very high opinion of his abilities.

The officer who had quizzed the villains' victim was one of the exceptions, and having turned him over to Bryce he walked away with an air of self-importance.

"You must do something at once," exclaimed the young man, grasping the detective's arm.

"Unless the two men are caught before the closing hour, I will have to go back to my employer with a falsehood on my lips. I dare not tell him that I was robbed of the most important of his papers. He has been dying of a mysterious disease for a week and the doctors say he cannot possibly hold out another twenty-four hours."

Mr. Bryce gave the speaker a look which took him in from head to foot.

"I presume you are Mr. Musgrave's private secretary?" said he.

"That is the relation I hold to him," was the reply.

A pause.

"Can you describe accurately the contents of the package of which you were robbed?"

"Must I do that?"

"It would accelerate matters."

"While the thieves are getting away with their plunder, I don't see why I should keep you here with such talk. I think a description of the men would be better."

"You think so, eh?" exclaimed Bryce, and his manner was somewhat insulting. "What is your name?" he added quickly.

"Leon Larimore, sir."

"Well, Mr. Larimore, come down to my office. We'll there set a trap for the rascals who have plundered you."

"But I must go back at once to my employer."

"At once? Then you go back with the falsehood you were talking about awhile ago," observed the detective with a smile. "You won't have the receipt of the Trust Company to exhibit to him, and, all for all, Mr. Larimore, you will be in an unpleasant situation."

The young man winced, and seemed to lose color at the lips.

"You want to escape the reporters, sir. I don't like 'em," and Baldimore Bryce shrugged his shoulders. "They'll twist everything out of you, and will have a column or so of stuff in the afternoon dailies, all of which will give the thieves an advantage, and kill your employer the quicker. Don't you see?"

Almost before he knew what was transpiring, Leon Larimore was in a small room some distance from the scene of the robbery.

The place was Bryce's private office.

Already the private secretary had formed a poor opinion of the sleuth's abilities as an unraveler of tangled skeins, and he was not in the room five minutes before he wanted to get out.

"I know a man who can run the thieves to earth if they are to be run down," he said to himself. "This man wants to do little for good pay. Why did I fall into the clutches of this so-called shadow? The policeman did it all. To perdition with the cop!"

After a while Leon informed Bryce that he was going.

More than an hour had passed since the robbery, and much precious time had been lost.

He was not authorized to offer any reward for the stolen package, but he was certain that a round sum would be paid for it.

"We want it back without injury," said the young man. "The seal must not be tampered with; the packet must not be despoiled in any way."

A sudden light shone from Bryce's eyes.

"Could it have contained such a thing as Monckton Musgrave's will?"

Despite his assumed calmness, the young secretary answered with a start.

He affected not to have heard the question.

"It contained a fortune, and we want the packet back," he replied. "I have given you as accurate a description as I can of the men who committed the assault. I am now going back to Mr. Musgrave. It would be a relief to me to find him dead, for then I will not have to deliver a lie coined for the occasion."

"Was he lower than he has been when you left?"

"He was a little stronger, sir, but he was dying all the same."

"Who is his heir?"

Leon looked quickly at the detective.

"I don't see that a discussion of these matters affects the case," he said, tartly, and then he left Bryce to his reflections, and went down upon the street again.

As we have said, but little more than an hour had elapsed since the carrying out of the plot formed in the little eight-by-ten room in Mag Manacle's establishment by Barry Black, Kit Kline and Mr. Muggles, the unknown.

It had been successful in the highest degree, and the cool rogues who had carried it out had cause for self-congratulations.

The private secretary felt his loss the more keenly when he reached the street and glanced toward the well-known quarters of the Fidelity Trust Co., where the lost will and private papers of Monckton Musgrave should have been at that moment, but were not.

He had no place to go, but back to the robbed and dying man.

He avoided the crowds that seemed to press about him with a thousand questions on their lips.

He wanted to get out of human sight.

Suddenly the clarion voice of a newsboy rung out ahead of him.

"All about the afternoon robbery on Broadway! Private secretary stopped and robbed of a fortune! Here's your Telegram, with full particulars!"

This announcement set Leon Larimore's brain in a whirl.

For a moment the houses seemed to go through a devil's dance before his eyes, but he braced himself with an effort and thrust one of the newsboys rather rudely to one side.

In an Elevated car which he took, the robbery seemed to be the general topic, and an old man who sat near him persisted in reading the account aloud.

It was the keenest torture to the young man, but he had to endure it all.

Fortunately no one in the car knew him, and he escaped a new infliction.

He entered the handsome residence of Monckton Musgrave wondering whether the evil tidings had beaten him home.

As he stole into the darkened room where he had left the dying man, he disturbed a person who turned round and faced him.

Leon started and let slip a cry; he could not help it.

The man was Tully Trenck, Musgrave's old friend, and as the secretary gazed at him he wondered what had brought him back at that evil hour.

"Hol you did come back!" exclaimed the man who was good-looking, with an excellent physique, and piercing black eyes. "Some of us thought you would not return after what happened."

Leon glanced toward the bed where everything was quiet.

"You can't trouble him now; he's beyond that!" Tully Trenck went on, his eyes detecting

the young man's look. "He heard the terrible tidings, gave one gasp, and all was over!"

An exclamation came from Leon as he sprang to the bed, and the next moment he seemed frozen into a statue over the corpse of Monckton Musgrave.

"There shall be vengeance—merciless vengeance for this!" he cried, springing back and whirling upon the man who was watching him.

"I devote my life to discovery and punishment. I record in the Book of Heaven's eternal justice an oath to hunt down and punish the murderers of Monckton Musgrave. My life shall know no other task!"

CHAPTER VII.

FINDING THE SLEUTH.

PERHAPS it was a cynical smile that appeared at the depressed corners of Tully Trenck's set lips as Leon finished his vow; perhaps it was nothing at all.

A singular silence, one that lasted several seconds, fell between the two men.

Besides the dead man on the bed they were the only occupants of the room.

"When did you come to town?" suddenly asked Larimore, breaking the, to him, at least, perplexing silence.

"I reached New York about noon," with a glance toward the couch. "Did he ask for me?"

"Quite often," replied Leon. "We tried to find you, too."

"Ah! Did you telegraph abroad?"

"We did. Under his directions we sent telegrams to Philadelphia, Baltimore and even to Chicago."

"None of them found me, of course; I did not hear of his serious sickness for an hour after my return. Then I hastened hither as rapidly as possible."

"Who told him—"

Leon checked himself, for at that moment he caught the piercing eye of Tully Trenck fixed upon him in a strange manner.

"The news came in from the outside. A news imp with his papers stopped directly under the window and cried his sensation. The old man caught the very words the first time, and with an agonizing cry of 'My God!' he fell back and expired. I happened to be alone with him at the time; the nurse had just stepped out. So you see I came back in time to see him die. Now give me the particulars."

"Have you not seen the papers?"

"One was brought in a while ago, but I preferred to wait for the true story from your lips."

The two men adjourned to a room that adjoined the chamber of death, and there Leon narrated the story of the robbery on the street.

He knew that Tully Trenck and the dead man, his employer, had been friends for twenty-five years:

As Musgrave's private secretary he knew some secrets which were not known beyond the walls of the house.

He recollected having seen Musgrave late one night in the library soon after the mysterious disease had taken hold on him. He was destroying a lot of papers which he took from the innermost compartment of a strong safe, and when the work was completed he fell in a fainting fit on the library lounge.

When he (Leon) went in to administer to his master's wants he saw in the grate, at the edge of the coals, a paper almost entirely destroyed.

Curiosity prompted the private secretary to inspect the fragments, and the discovery was made that Musgrave had made way with a will!

"That cuts Tully Trenck off unless Musgrave draws up another," Leon remembered having thought to himself, for he knew that the cold-looking man who confronted him in the dead man's bedroom, after the robbery, was to be the robber's sole legatee.

Leon had told no one about this startling circumstance, but he thought of it while he gave Tully Trenck the particulars of the robbery of the packet on its way to the vaults of the Fidelity Trust Company.

Only once or twice did his listener interpose a question. Leon was permitted to tell his story in words that suited him best, and he told it in full.

"I fear the papers are gone forever," said Trenck, at last. "The men who did the work evidently suspected that the packet contained money. As it did not, as you say, they have doubtless flung the proofs of their rascality into the fire ere this."

"But how came they to select me?" asked Leon.

"Nobody outside ought to have known that you were expected to carry the papers to the vaults."

"Nobody could have known! I am not a public messenger. I haven't been in the rooms of the Fidelity Company three times in a year. Those fellows were watching for me. The manner in which they proceeded told me that in a second. What I want to know is—How was I betrayed? But, never mind! We will unravel this tangled skin one of these days. I will get

to the bottom of the well, no difference how deep it is, nor how dangerous the descent."

"When did you first know that you were to convey the papers?" quietly asked Trenck.

"Day before yesterday."

"He told you, then?"

"Yes."

"Who else knew?"

"No one. Stay! Mr. Ringgold might have known."

"Who is he?"

"A retired young lawyer who has been here off and on."

"Where does he live?"

"I don't know."

"Did he come often?"

"Not more than twice a week."

"When was he here last?"

"On Monday afternoon."

"That was four days ago?"

"Yes."

"You will pardon these questions, Mr. Larimore," said Trenck. "I am as anxious as you can be to get to the very bottom of this mystery. I may want to know some things that will strike you as being peculiar. Mr. Musgrave's will was in the package of which you were robbed?"

"It was."

"When was it made?"

"Three weeks ago to-morrow night."

"Did you sign it?"

"I did."

"Was it read to you?"

"No. I merely witnessed his signature."

"To whom was it read?"

"To no one unless to the Mr. Ringgold I have mentioned."

"Are you certain he heard it read?"

"I am not."

Trenck cut off his inquisition as abruptly as he had begun it.

He seemed to have picked up some information not very satisfactory, and, as he did not resume his questions, Leon withdrew.

He went thoughtfully up to his room almost directly over the death-chamber on the upper floor.

"I'm going to keep my vow—to the very letter!" exclaimed the young man. "There has been some secret foul play here, and I know it. What brought Tully Trenck back to-day, and why does he want to know so much about the will, and about Ralph Ringgold?"

At that moment a light footstep at the door caught his ear, and stepping noiselessly across the room he threw it open to stand face to face with the nurse.

She was a woman of perhaps five-and-thirty, with a pretty face, expressive deep-brown eyes, and a well-rounded figure.

It was no secret that she had once been married, and while she did not object to the familiar name of Irene, she was usually called Mrs. Nims.

She started on seeing the door opened so suddenly and Leon's face there, but in an instant she had recovered her composure.

"It came unexpectedly, didn't it?" exclaimed the woman. "I had just left the room—"

"When the newsboy told him all, eh?" finished the private secretary as Mrs. Nims paused in a strange manner.

"Yes, the newsboy," she went on.

"I must have been on my way home when the end came," said Leon. "If the boy had kept away we might have lengthened his hold on life. The best sleuths of the city would have been put on the trail, and the papers might have turned up to enable him to die satisfied."

"From what the papers say, I think they are lost forever," Mrs. Nims resumed. "Those two men are not going to restore or compromise anything."

"They may be forced to restore!" said Leon emphatically.

Irene slowly and doubtfully shook her head.

"I am going out now," she suddenly answered. "My engagement is at an end, you know."

"At an end?"

"Yes. I engaged to remain till he died. That time has come."

"Won't you remain a few days longer, Irene?" asked Leon eagerly.

Another shake of the head.

"I am compelled to say that I cannot. I have been paid in full to this afternoon, and I am desirous of reaching my sister's before dark."

Leon mechanically looked out at the window. The day was nearly at an end, and the long shadows of the short summer twilight were beginning to fall.

Mrs. Nims bowed to Leon as he turned, and walked in direction of her room at the end of the turn in the corridor.

The young man shut his door and began to make a note of all that had occurred.

By and by he heard footsteps and the rustle of a dress, and, after awhile, the opening and shutting of a door below.

"Mrs. Nims is gone," he thought as he went back to his task after listening to these noises.

"Well, I know where to find her should I ever have use for her."

Up to this time the outside world did not know that Monckton Musgrave was dead.

Tully Trenck had been left in full possession of the lower part of the house, and when Leon went down he found him smoking quietly in the library.

"Mrs. Nims has departed, and I trust you will excuse me," said the smoker, rising as the young man entered the room. "I can do no good here, and, then, I think the proper place to work is on the outside."

Leon raised no objection to his departure, and, five minutes later, the secretary and his dead employer were the sole occupants of the elegant house.

"A cool scamp! I'll bet my head on it!" mused Leon, as Tully Trenck vanished through the front door. "Now, Mr. Trenck, since you have suggested that the place to work is on the outside, I will act on your counsel."

The twilight gave way to the shadows of genuine night, and here and there throughout the length and breadth of New York, lamps flashed like myriads of fireflies.

At length the front door of Monckton Musgrave's house opened, and Leon Larimore came out.

He did not leave the place tenanted only by the dead, for he had called neighbors in, and then excused himself for a time.

The young man took a car and went downtown.

In the vicinity of lower Broadway, and not very far from the scene of his adventure with the two robbers, he alighted and went over to the great thoroughfare itself.

All at once he took a small card from his pocket, glanced at it under one of the electric lights, and then put it back.

Suddenly he disappeared in one of the numerous open stairways to be found in every city, and soon reached an upper floor.

Almost directly in front of him was a door, at which he knocked.

"Come in!" was called out from within.

Leon opened the door and entered.

He saw two men in the room where, as his manner indicated, he expected to find but one.

One of them he recognized with a quick start. "Heavens! Mr. Ringgold, I did not expect to find you here," he cried. "I have called to see Mr. Philip Fox, the detective. I have something for him, as you may guess. Is he in?"

An odd smile stole over the face of the man Leon addressed.

"Sit down, Leon," said he. "Phil Fox is in. I am he!"

"Impossible!" exclaimed the private secretary.

CHAPTER VIII.

COVERING THE TRAIL.

THE sudden death of Monckton Musgrave, following as it did on the heels of the theft of his will, was another sensation for New York.

It was generally believed that Leon Larimore had been betrayed to the thieves by some one, but there were people ready to shake their heads and say that the young man knew more about the robbery than he would tell.

Musgrave was carried to the family vault, and Leon, for the present, took possession of the house with a housekeeper who was not Mrs. Nims.

Phil Fox, the Broadway detective was at work, or at least he had promised Leon that he would take the case.

As we have seen, the surprise of the private secretary on visiting the detective's office was complete.

He had not suspected that Ralph Ringgold, Musgrave's frequent visitor, and the daring city sleuth were one, and when the shadow refused to tell him why he had played double, the mystery was still further increased.

It was the fifth night after Leon's visit and a man came up a certain street, and popped into Mag Manacle's.

He walked into a room where half a dozen tables were occupied by men, some of whom evidently were gambling.

He stopped a few seconds and looked over the crowd as if seeking a particular person, then he crossed the room and vanished.

A minute afterward he reappeared in an apartment that was not occupied. It was the little eight-by-ten room where we have been before.

This man drew a rough looking knife from his pocket and tossed it against the ceiling three times in succession, then pocketed it and took a seat at the table.

Presently there was a heavy footstep beyond the door, and Mag entered.

At sight of her visitor the woman stopped suddenly, but soon came forward with her eyes upon him.

"A bottle of your best, Mag," said he, throwing a five-dollar gold piece upon the table. "I don't mean bottled fire, nor doctored stuff. I've got the chink to pay for your very best, and I want it."

Mag gave the man another look, then picked up the money and departed.

In a little while she came back, bearing a tray

on which sat a black bottle of wine and a solitary goblet.

"Sit down—the chair there," the man ordered. "I have something to say."

The huge figure of the proprietress of the den dropped upon the chair at the other end of the little table, where she watched the man as he broke the neck of the bottle by a dextrous blow with his knife and swallowed a glass of its contents with great gusto.

"I want to know, Mag, if they often arrest people here?" suddenly asked the man across the table.

The woman started a little, and shook her head.

"They took Bobolink away from your place the other night?"

"Yes," admitted Mag.

"Who took him?"

"An officer."

"A regular cop?"

"No."

"Who, then? Don't you want to tell?"

"I am not caring. It is nothing to me," answered the woman in an off-hand manner. "He was taken by a private officer."

"A detective, eh?"

"Phil Fox."

"What did Bobolink say?"

"Nothing that I heard."

The man looked at Mag as if he doubted her word.

"Curse his tongue, it has been wagging!" grated he, as he poured out another glass of the dark wine some of which trickled over his beard like drops of blood.

"I say he said nothing here," persisted the woman. "I don't know what he may have said elsewhere."

"Of course not. But hasn't that infernal sleuth-hound been here to quiz you?"

"I haven't seen Phil Fox since he took Bobolink off."

"Yes," continued the man going back to the subject nearest his thoughts. "Bobolink, laboring under a misapprehension, gave me away."

"You?"

"He told that I was here, in this very room, with two other men a short time before he was taken."

"Did he do that, Kit?"

"He did!"

"I never thought that of Bobolink."

"He always was tonguey," was the rejoinder.

"He thought I put the detective onto him, or at least he says so. Now, Mag, I want to know what you will say if he comes here seeking a confirmation of Bobolink's story."

"I never give anybody away," answered Big Mag, promptly and with a firmness that should have convinced her visitor, Kit Kline the ex-convict and thorough-paced crook.

"Then you would tell him nothing?"

"I have already answered you."

"It'll be money in your pocket, Mag, to take this stand. I am authorized to say this, and to clinch my statement. I have here something none of us ever refuse."

Kit unbuttoned his coat and put one hand into an inner pocket.

"If you've got money there, keep it where it is," suddenly exclaimed the woman. "I don't have to be paid for protecting my customers. I don't care who has authorized you to pay me—man or woman—I don't want a dollar of it!"

Kit looked astonished.

"Mag, you're worth your weight in gold, and that's a good deal!" he laughed, taking in the Amazonian figure before him. "I'm perfectly willing to forget the little choking you gave me a few years ago, on one of the memorable occasions of my life. Here's to the woman with lips of silence!"

And he emptied the remaining portion of the wine into the glass and drank it down, while Mag looked on, saying nothing.

"What have the sleuths found out by this time?" she asked, as the goblet came back to the table with a force that threatened its existence.

"About what?"

"The sensation of the other day—the theft of the fortune on Broadway?"

Kline started.

"Does that interest you?" he demanded.

"No more, perhaps, than it does thousands of others," was the reply.

"They have discovered nothing that I have heard," Kit answered. "It was rather a cool play, eh, Mag?"

"It was cool, and only nervy men would attempt such a thing," and she looked Kit squarely in the face as she spoke. "I am told that Baltimore Bryce took the private secretary away after the plucking. If he heads the hounds, the fellows who plucked the pigeon need not feel uneasy. I know him."

"You know them all, Mag?"

"About all."

Kit leaned back in his chair, and one of his slender but cruel-looking hands toyed with the glass on the table.

"Who is accounted the best spotter in New York?" he asked.

"Phil Fox," was the prompt response.

"The man who took Bobolink?"

Mag nodded.

"Does he come here often?"

"No; scarcely ever."

"When will he come again?"

"I cannot say."

Kline pushed his chair back and got up.

"Remember that you don't want to confirm Bobolink's statement," he warned, leaning slightly toward the woman. "The men who were here in this room just ahead of him were your customers. They drank of your liquors and paid their score like gentlemen. They may do so more than once in the future. So stick to your customers, Mag."

"I always stick to them," was the answer.

Kit took his departure, and for some moments the woman remained at the door in a brown study.

"I stick to those who stick to me," her thoughts ran. "You are as shrewd now, Kit Kline, as when you played your cool and keen hands years ago. You don't want Phil Fox to discover who counseled in my private room before he caught Bobolink there. Well, I don't blame you." And Mag closed the door and went back.

Meantime Kit was on the street, but with a moving shadow at his heels, though he knew it not.

This person seemed suited for a trail of the kind, for he glided along without noise, and did not lose sight of the man whom he shadowed.

It was not Phil Fox, for the trailer did not possess the detective's physique, but his movements told that he was no novice in the shadower's art.

Kit led this shadower from one street to another, and when he did "hole up" it was in a respectable-looking house some distance from the starting-point.

The trailer did not fail to observe the number of the house.

If he could have followed Kit he would have seen him walk into a room where a large man, with glowing black eyes, was smoking, while he looked over some papers on a table before him.

As Kit came in the occupation was thrown aside, and he had the attention of the black eyes in a moment.

"You?" exclaimed the person at the table, with some surprise. "I thought you were going away?"

"With the business unfinished? I have just come from Mag's."

"And what does she say?"

By this time the ex-convict had taken a seat near the man.

One could have seen at a glance that there was a great difference between these two men.

There was the unmistakable cut of the villain about the convict. One did not have to look at him the second time to "size him up," and while he could put on a dozen excellent disguises in an hour, the shrewd man-catcher—like Phil Fox, for instance—could see the mark of the beast on his brow.

The other man had the appearance of gentility. His surroundings were those of wealth; but for all this there was a link between the two—between the gentleman and the rogue.

"What does Mag say, eh?" repeated Kit, a moment after his companion's question. "I guess she's solid."

"We want no guesses!" was the answer, in rather severe tones.

"I'll vouch for her then; but by George! I hate to have to knuckle to that woman."

"Why, Kit?"

"Never mind. I don't like to uncover a past that is not a pleasant one. My teeth grit without an effort when I look at Mag Manacle, and once more I feel— Never mind what I feel!" and his hands, clinched, one against his leg, and the other at the edge of the table.

At that moment a slight noise attracted both men, and Kit turned half around to see Black Barry enter the room.

There was a peculiar grin on Barry's face, and he succeeded in keeping the gaze of Kit and his companion till he reached the table.

"Well!" said he, his brow darkening as he spoke, "we've got to turn on the hounds at once."

"Why, Barry?" exclaimed both men at a breath.

"Because they are dangerously near the trail."

The silence of a few seconds followed.

"I'll clear the way," broke in the strange man. "Gentlemen, I want the hounds out o' the way within twenty-four hours."

He addressed Kit and Barry, who exchanged significant looks.

"If that is true, I'll not take wing just yet!" and Kline laughed. "I want to cross arms with Phil Fox—the arms of Diamond Dunn, at that. Ha, ha!"

CHAPTER IX.

THE SLEUTH'S SLEUTH.

THE man who had followed Kit Kline from Big Mag's den to the house where we have just seen him, was Sam Sharpe, the person so closely connected with Phil Fox, the genteel spotter in the discovery of crime.

He did not wait for Kit to emerge from the

place, but, having secured the number, he went back.

In a little while he entered the Broadway office, but it had no tenant.

"Not in, eh?" exclaimed Sam, somewhat disappointed. "I've got some news for him, but it will keep."

Then he crossed the room and touched a button adroitly set in the wall.

A small door near by opened, and the detective's assistant took a bit of folded paper from a pocket-like space before him.

Giving the button another push which closed the door, he walked back and opened the note.

"Go down to —th street and see what you can do with Mrs. Nims. The number given is 333. If you should see Leon, which is not likely—"

Sam was interrupted right there in the perusal of the note by the opening of the door at his right.

He looked up and saw the very man whose name he had just read—Leon Larimore, the private secretary.

"Hello!" cried Sam as the young man came forward. "Just wait till I finish this. There's something about you here," and Leon stared at him wonderingly as he returned to the paper.

"If you should see Leon," he read. "Get what additional information you think you will need. But be sure to look after Irene Nims. It is very important; *you know why*."

Having reached the end of the instructions which were signed with a mark perfectly intelligible to him, Sam turned to Leon and waved him to a chair.

"Where is Mr. Fox?" eagerly inquired the young secretary.

"That would be hard to tell just now."

"When will he return?"

"Another conundrum," laughed Sam. "You will have to hit me with something easier if you want a satisfactory response. Now give me a chance."

Leon flushed a little.

"Go ahead!" he said settling back into the chair.

"This last housekeeper employed by Musgrave—the woman who was with him when he died?—Mrs. Nims—"

"Irene!" interrupted Leon. "I came here for the express purpose of talking about her."

"Ah!" cried Sam. "She is at 333 —th street."

"She was there, but she has taken flight."

"When did this occur?"

"To-day. Irene has gone abroad."

Sam Sharpe seemed to lose breath.

"What! has Mrs. Nims left this country?" he exclaimed.

"Yes. She was one of the Scotia's passengers this morning."

"Why didn't you come here with the news sooner?"

"I did not learn it till a little while ago."

"Gone to Europe! That's a clever trick," muttered Sam, looking at the floor while he spoke, then suddenly glancing up at Leon, he went on:

"This is what you wanted to say to Mr. Fox, I presume?"

"It is."

"Well, I will tell him," was the reply. "The bird flies across the water. Let her go."

"Would Philip Fox say that?"

"I don't know," laughed Sam. "But we can't catch Irene even if we want her, so what's the use? I'm going out now, and you, Mr. Leon?"

"Oh, I'm going out, too."

Down on the street the two men separated, and as Leon Larimore walked off he was watched by a pair of sharp eyes till he had passed out of sight.

"Gone to Europe, eh?" exclaimed Sam Sharpe, as he turned away. "Sailed on the Scotia which got off this morning! Well, Mrs. Nims takes sudden wing. I wonder what frightened the bird off?" And Phil Fox's right-hand man laughed again to himself.

The following moment he increased his gait and kept it up till he turned into a street where the dwelling-houses were largely frame and very plain ones at that.

There was nothing about Sam that suggested his calling. To the contrary, he looked the very opposite of a sleuth's sleuth.

He approached one of the houses which carried above the door the number 333.

A moment's inspection of the house seemed to settle something in Sam's mind, and then he jerked the bell.

"Gone to Europe sure enough," he said, to himself, as silence was the only answer he obtained. "It seemed to me that the mystery—the double mystery—gets deeper. Good luck to you, Mrs. Nims. May fortune and a pair of handcuffs find you one of these fine days."

Sam turned from the house and retraced his steps.

He was a few feet away when he turned his head and saw the shutters above the front door shut tighter than they were.

The movement was not accompanied by any noise but Sam's quick eyes had seen it.

A smile came to his lips, and he muttered as he resumed his tramp:

"There's somebody back there who didn't go to Europe! Shutters don't open and shut that way of their own accord. Sailed in the Scotia, hey? It's worth looking after."

The detective's right bower turned abruptly to the left.

The hour was not late, and he was quick of foot.

Not long afterward Sam entered a little office where he was stared at by a young man who was leaning back in an arm-chair enjoying a cigar.

"I would like to see the passenger list of the Scotia which went out this morning," said Sam.

The clerk pointed to a table.

"Help yourself, sir," he answered, and Sam turned to the list and began at the top.

All at once his finger stopped. It was near the bottom name.

"Have you found what you want?" asked the clerk.

Sam looked under his finger, and read for the third time:

"Mrs. Irene Nims, 333 —th street, New York."

"I recollect that entry," said the young man in the chair. "The lady engaged passage herself; came here in person, and took first cabin. It was at the eleventh hour, as they say, but I managed to get her a berth. Friend of yours, eh?"

"I know her," replied Sam, and then he looked curiously at the clerk. "Do all people sail who engage passage?"

"Bless you, no," responded the young man, laughing at the question. "Something turns up at the last moment to delay many people. But Mrs. Nims was not delayed. You are looking at the list of the Scotia's actual passengers."

"It is rather odd. I was to have seen this lady before her departure."

"Too late now, sir," smiled the shipping-clerk.

"Of course."

"There's no boat afloat that can catch the Scotia."

"I don't want to catch her. Mrs. Nims is a spry little woman, isn't she?"

"Not very little," was the quick answer. "If I was going to look out for a body-guard of Amazons I wouldn't pass Mrs. Nims by. She is a magnificent giantess."

"Your passenger?"

"Yes, sir. I refer to the lady who came here and engaged passage for Mrs. Irene Nims, which name she said she bore herself."

A sudden light seemed to break in upon Sam's mind.

"There's another bit of sly work here!" he mentally exclaimed. "Irene Nims would never pass muster for an Amazon. The woman who engaged passage on the Scotia was not Irene, and the shutter at 333 didn't shut for nothing when I looked back."

Sam left the little office in time to keep the marine clerk from putting a series of questions which his visit had suggested, and once more he was on the streets of New York.

He went back to —th street, as if destiny controlled his movements.

The frame house stood quiet as before.

The shutters were tightly shut now, but Sam saw a glimmer of light beyond the one directly above the front door.

For several minutes he stood secluded across the street and watched the light with the eye of the street hawk.

All at once it shifted to one of the other upper rooms where it remained.

Suddenly the door of the house opened and Sam saw a person come out, who started off and the detective's spy started after.

"Somebody who belongs to 333 isn't on the sea to-night; that's certain," thought Sam as he watched the man ahead of him.

He followed his quarry up one street and down another until to his great surprise, he entered the house to which not long before he had tracked Kit Kline from Mag Manacle's!

"In the name of fortune, what does this mean?" exclaimed Sam, gazing at the house whose closed portal shut him out. "I'll bet my head that Irene Nims is in New York to-night, and that the man I have tracked has talked with her since sundown. I think I know enough for a report."

Back to the office on Broadway went Sam.

"Captain Phil was right when he said that the brain that planned the robbery of the Musgrave documents on the street, planned also a greater scheme—one that killed. We've got to fight a league of the coolest fiends we ever dealt with. I've seen enough to-night to tell me this."

Here Sam opened the door of Phil Fox's office and walked in.

"I left the gas a little higher than that," thought the sleuth's man as he observed the bluish flame that played above the burner. "Maybe Phil has been here—"

At that moment something darted toward Sam from the corner near the door, and the next second he was seized by a pair of powerful hands and held as a vise of steel would hold a victim.

"Not just yet!" laughed a voice as he strug-

gled. "We hold the best hand and the last one, Phil Fox!"

The last words told Sam much.

He was mistaken for the Genteel Spotter, and by a foe who evidently meant to do a desperate deed.

The next instant Sam got a glimpse of his assailant's face, but not much of it rewarded him, for all above the mouth was hidden by a close-fitting black mask.

"There's too many of you trail-dogs," continued the man in his peculiarly hissing tones. "The breed is too numerous for the country's good. I guess I'll begin to cut it down."

Sam seemed to know what that meant, for he tried desperately to jerk loose from the mask's grip.

"Wait! I'll let you go in a moment," laughed the villain, and then a hand went up above Sam's head and came down like a bolt of lightning.

A sharp cry escaped from the young spy's throat. It was followed by another as the hand rose and fell again, then with a brutal laugh full of a devil's triumph, the mask pushed Sam away.

Phil Fox's sleuth fell across the lounge that rested against the wall.

The man turned the gas a little higher and crossed to where he lay.

There was a glitter in the deep black eyes behind the velvet.

One look was enough.

"I guess I've silenced that hound on the trail," and the speaker walked away leaving the office as silent as the tomb.

He vanished like a shadow on the street below. Ten minutes passed away.

On the floor and on the lounge were several ghastly spots.

All at once Sam moved.

Clutching the woodwork of the lounge, he helped himself up.

One of his hands was covered with blood, and his teeth grated as he looked at it.

His eyes had the stare of a death-struck man. He staggered across the room to where the light of the gas-jet fell on a spot of white wall.

Then he steadied himself and raised the bloody hand. Teeth and eyes were fiercely set now.

Sam Sharpe had a duty to perform. He did it well, for as the stricken detective's spy fell back with a wild cry there stood forth on the wall in letters of blood a name:

"KIT KLINE!"

CHAPTER X.

STABBED INTO SILENCE.

AFTER this there was silence in the detective's office.

One by one the hours of that summer night were tolled off by the clocks of Gotham.

Far from the spot a girl worked a sewing-machine and watched the stitches it made.

In another part of the city Mag Manacle catered to her nocturnal customers, and the rooms of her resort resounded with laughter and rude jests.

As to the man who had lain in wait for Detective Fox, but who had struck the wrong victim, and then disappeared, he was nowhere to be seen.

Still the name on the wall shone in the light of the jet as it awaited the time of discovery and vengeance.

At length the night gave place to the first beams of a new day.

The morning advanced and the city resumed its roar and bustle.

It was past six o'clock when a footstep came up the stair that terminated at the door of the famous sleuth's office.

A young man paused there and turned the knob.

The next moment he stepped inside, and then halted as if he had been suddenly riveted to the floor.

"My God! murder!" he exclaimed, as he stared with dilated eyes at the form on the floor, with every indication of a terrible crime about it.

That early visitor was Leon Larimore.

He seemed to see nothing but the body on the floor. If he had looked up he might have noticed the name on the wall, but he did not.

When he had regained his composure, he bent over the sleuth's spy.

"This is one of the plays of the mysterious game," said he. "A crime of this nature had to be perpetrated to shield the theft of the will of Musgrave. This man is Phil Fox's right hand; he was on the trail when stricken down, and the hand that dealt the blow robbed me on Broadway. I have sworn to go to the end of this mystery. I could renew my oath over the body of this man, but it is unnecessary. I will go there just the same."

Leon was about to examine the body before him when the door opened.

As he turned his head he sprang up, and stood face to face with Phil Fox himself.

"I have just come," exclaimed Leon, and then he pointed excitedly at Sam Sharpe. "You see that? Another act in the dark play, Captain Fox!"

Phil Fox crossed the room and looked down into his comrade's face.

"This man isn't dead," he said, glancing at Leon.

"Thank Heaven! Then we will get a clew from his lips!"

The city shadow did not hear these words.

With fingers at Sam's wrist, he was bending over him, and Leon had nothing to do but to keep silence and look on.

"How is it?" he eagerly asked, as the hand fell from the detective's grasp. "Is there a chance for him?"

"Yes, because there's life here," was the reply.

"We want a doctor. We—"

"Go down for one—three doors to the right, up-town, this side of the street. Doctor Young, professional. Go!"

Leon waited for no more, and Phil Fox heard him going down the steps.

"The young man is right. This is one of the plays," he said to himself. "But why Sam? What had he discovered that he must be followed and daggered for silence? Sam has keen eyes, a level head and a noiseless step. For them to know this was to steady the arm that drove the knife home. But beware! You have left Phil Fox!"

It was not till then that the detective, who had risen, discovered the name in red on the background of white.

"Ha! Sam left the clew before he gave up!" he exclaimed, starting forward, and then he read again the name traced by the fingers he had lately touched.

All at once the sleuth crossed the room and took a picture down from where it had hung for months.

A few inches above the name was a nail, and in a minute Phil Fox had hung the picture upon it, so that it completely covered the writing on the wall.

Scarcely had he done this ere Leon came back, followed by a man known as Doctor Young.

The doctor's eyes wandered instantly to Sam Sharpe; then they looked inquiringly at the detective.

"Look at the case," said Phil Fox.

"Murder?" asked the doctor.

The sleuth met the question with a quiet smile.

"That is for the future," he responded. "I want to know if my man will live."

Doctor Young proceeded to business.

If there had been a regular physician within easy call he would not have been summoned. He was known as an advertising doctor, whose cures were always "remarkable ones," and whose patients were many and invisible.

"As good as dead, sir," announced the doctor, glancing up at the detective. "Two incised wounds in the right breast, either of which is sufficient to produce death. How did it happen, sir?"

The face of Detective Phil grew stern. He was rapidly losing patience with the inquisitive man of medicine.

"Can't you bring the man back to consciousness?" he asked.

Doctor Young shook his head.

"Then I will get some one who can."

"Did you find him here as you were telling me?" the doctor asked, turning to Leon.

"I—"

"This is not a court," suddenly interrupted Phil Fox, at which Doctor Young lowered his brows, repeated his professional opinion with added emphasis, and tramped from the room.

"We will see what we can do, Leon," said the detective. "The opinion of that medical gas-bag may not be worth the breath that impels it."

"We want the clew—the clew, Captain Fox!" ejaculated Leon. "I came here to tell you last night that Irene had gone to Europe—"

"To Europe!" broke in the New York sleuth, drawing back from the body he was in the act of touching.

"Yes, sir," assented Leon. "Not finding you in, I told him, and we went out together."

"When did Irene go?"

"When the Scotia sailed."

"And that was—"

"Yesterday morning, sir."

"Are you sure of this, Leon?"

The young secretary flushed as if his word had been doubted, but the detective's manner assured him that such was not the case.

"Her name is among the list of the Scotia's cabin passengers," he answered. "I saw it myself, and 333—th street is shut up."

To the young man's surprise no reply or comment was made, and he saw the gentleman spotter return quietly to his companion.

The two men expected that Doctor Young would spread the report of the tragedy, but as nobody came up-stairs to investigate, they concluded that the quack intended to let matters take their course without being mixed up in them.

It was some time before a movement of any kind gave Phil Fox any encouragement.

When he saw signs of returning consciousness he sent Leon down with a sealed note, and then locked the door.

Sam Sharpe had been lifted from the floor to the lounge, and his eyes were fastened on the prize sleuth of Gotham with a wild stare.

The detective put his first eager questions carefully, but there was no reply.

Again and again he questioned Sam, but all he got was a strange noise that seemed to proceed from the throat, but was not intelligible.

When Leon came back from his second mission he was accompanied by a man who was cordially greeted by the detective.

"I've got him back to consciousness, doctor, but that is all," said he, nodding toward the police surgeon.

"Can't he explain?"

"He wants to, but he cannot talk."

The doctor approached Sam, and examined him a few moments.

"I saw a case like this twenty years ago," he remarked, turning to the detective, who had stepped to his side. "A man was stabbed three times in the right breast. Twice the blade of the knife, owing to the position of the men at the time, reached the vocal organs. The victim recovered, but he never spoke again."

Phil Fox looked at the man on the lounge.

"Is that your opinion in this case?" he asked.

"I'm afraid I'll have to come to it."

"Then we have no clew!" exclaimed Leon. "Once more a crime has been committed, and we are in the dark. Doctor, you must make that man talk. A word from him would prove clew enough. He evidently knows who assaulted him."

The police surgeon smiled, perhaps at Leon's eagerness.

"We'll do the best we can," he answered.

"More than this, young man, we cannot do."

"I wish to heaven I had some men where I want them!" the secretary sent through his teeth, as he walked to the window and looked down into the street below. "I'm not going to lose confidence in Phil Fox because, as far as I can see, he has found no clew. The detective keeps his secrets as he should. I can see that this attempt at murder startles him, and that Irene's flight to Europe is the unexpected. I intend to stick to him awhile longer. If anybody can open the tangled skein, I believe him to be that man."

As there was no reason for keeping Sam Sharpe in the detective's office, he was taken to the hospital.

This work was done so quietly that the sleuth's right hand was comfortable there before a single reporter got an inkling of the affair.

The police doctor followed Sam to his destination, and when the two wounds had been examined, he stood confirmed in his opinion.

That afternoon the papers had all that was known of the crime of the Broadway office, or at least all that Phil Fox imparted, and no one could see from his manner that he was keeping anything back.

"Fetch me the wine that has the gold label, Mag," said one of Mag Manacle's customers, who dropped in rather late in the day, and when the Amazonian proprietress of the famous resort marched off to obey, he picked up a paper that lay on the table.

Down one column and up another his eye went with rapid glance.

Suddenly it stopped, while the man started.

He had found the account of all that was known of the strange assault on Sam Sharpe, the sleuth's spy.

"Is that true?" he mentally exclaimed, when he had reached the bottom. "Well, I know one fellow who ought to be whipped for a fool!"

He threw the paper upon the table with a gesture of rage and disgust, and pushed back his chair in the same spirit.

When Mag came in, with a sealed bottle in her hand, she looked everywhere for her customer.

"What took him off?" she cried. "He looked like a man whose lips watered for a drink—I see 'em often—but here he didn't wait."

"Your customer didn't stay, Mag," exclaimed a man, who addressed her from another table. "Something in the paper seemed to surprise him. Toss it over here, and leave the wine with me. I won't see you cheated out of a sale. By the way, who was that fellow?"

Mag Manacle came up with paper and bottle, and as she placed both before the man, she said in a low voice:

"You mistake me. I never give anybody away."

CHAPTER XI.

A RASCAL IN BORROWED WOOL.

"I WOULD like to know what discoveries Sam made, if any, before he got those fatal stabs."

"They sealed his lips, perhaps forever."

"So the doctors say."

"I am very sorry. Don't they give you any encouragement at all?"

"But very little."

"Then you have to hunt it out alone. The tangled skein is before you. The task is gigantic, dark and dangerous. I wish I was in no way concerned in it."

"Don't say that, Aida."

And Phil Fox, the genteel spotter, who occu-

pied a chair in Aida, the sewing-girl's apartments, spoke with feeling.

"You are running your head into danger for me. That is why I spoke as I did," was the quick response.

"Never mind that; don't think of it," said the sleuth, with a gesture of indifference. "You forget that I am a professional man-hunter, that I live among 'tangled skeins,' as you call them. I would not be doing my duty if I were to give up the hunt now. I have promised to bring the guilty to punishment, and to see that justice is done all around. Monckton Musgrave tried to make reparation before he died; he wanted to smooth his way to the tomb. It is not his fault that justice was not done in the end. It was the hand of villainy and theft that came between."

Aida glanced once or twice at the picture that hung on the wall above her machine—her mother's.

"Do you think," said the quick-witted girl, "that the man who was in the room when Sam came back, as your theory goes, was waiting for him? Don't you believe that he made a mistake?"

Detective Phil could not suppress a smile.

"Is that your belief, Aida?" he asked.

"I have thought of it," was the reply. "You are the head man on the trail. They would naturally begin with you."

For a moment the sleuth of Gotham made no reply.

"The girl sees through strange shadows," he thought to himself. "She believes what I believe. I could not convince her that Kit Kline waited for Sam and not for me, so I will not try."

"It is hard to tell, Aida," he answered the girl at last. "We will let the future throw light upon that which is dark now. Whatever the result is in Sam's case, he is to be avenged, for when the dagger struck him, it wounded me."

Ten minutes afterward Aida was alone, but not for long.

All at once above the noise of her machine a knock sounded on the door.

The girl crossed the room and opened it.

A well-dressed man confronted her, and as she caught his eye he tipped his hat and bowed politely.

"Miss Armstrong?" he asked.

Aida, still holding the latch, said "Yes, sir," and looked more searchingly than ever at her visitor.

"I would like a moment's conversation, if you are not engaged," and the speaker glanced over the girl's shoulder into the room, which he saw had but one tenant.

Aida opened the door a little more and said:

"Walk in. I am not busy just now."

The man, who appeared to be about forty-five, with a full, dark beard and sparkling black eyes, entered, and walked toward the light, with his hat in his hand.

Aida walked back to her accustomed seat at the machine, and quietly waited on her visitor's pleasure.

Never before had he crossed her threshold, and she could only wonder what had brought him to her home.

"You live here, I presume?" began the man, glancing about the room.

"It is my home," smiled the girl. "It is not as fine as some in the city," she added, "but I find that it meets all my wants."

He bowed slightly.

"My name is Dwyer," he pronounced the first half of the name with considerable emphasis. "I accidentally learned that you run a machine, also that you are an excellent seamstress. I don't intend to flatter; I never do that. What I learn I get from reliable authority, hence my presence here. My wife is desirous of having some fine work done, and as she is prejudiced against advertising dressmakers, she has given me a roving commission to find some one who fills the bill. For the right person, there is a good situation, a pleasant home and prompt and excellent pay. I believe I have found the right person in you, Miss Armstrong, and I am here to offer you all that I have spoken of."

"I never go out to work," Aida answered at once. "Enough work comes here to keep me employed."

"But living alone up two flights is not home," broke in Mr. Dwyer. "We have no children at our house, but for all that it is a pleasant place, and I am sure you will be delighted with Mrs. Dwyer. Do not say no, Miss Armstrong. I can give the best references. I guess Riley Dwyer is well enough known where he lives to satisfy the most exacting. I don't require an immediate removal. The piece of work now on your machine can be finished first. To secure a seamstress like yourself my wife will wait a spell."

The man's eagerness, or something else, seemed to impress Aida.

She was so little known in the city that she could not think who could have recommended her. Surely not Phil Fox the detective for he had not mentioned it, and not Leon Larimore with whom she was acquainted, for he had insisted on her keeping secluded till the mystery had been solved.

Aida the seamstress of Gotham was puzzled. "Where do you live, Mr. Dwyer?" she asked. "In a most excellent quarter—Number 906, T— street. I am sure you cannot object to location."

"I don't know much about New York although I have spent my life here," confessed the girl, smiling. "My explored kingdom lies in this vicinity and is not very large."

"Don't you never go to the parks?"

"Sometimes."

"Nor to the Battery?"

"Occasionally."

"Indeed, you have not seen much of the city," he went on. "Mrs. Dwyer will insist on your seeing more of it. I am sure of that. What shall I have the pleasure of telling her?"

Aida Armstrong seemed to hesitate.

"I understand that you don't like to give up the old rooms abruptly," he suddenly continued. "You can at least give me some good news for Mrs. D. I can come here for a final answer say to-morrow as I have some leisure when I am not at the Exchange, or among the bulls and bears on Gold street. Say to-morrow. At what hour shall it be, miss?"

"At three in the afternoon, if that suits you," replied the girl, speaking almost mechanically.

"Thanks. I assure you that you send me home in good spirits."

"You must not raise your wife's anticipations too high. My decision may be adverse—"

"I'll run the risk!" laughed the man. "I think I know a sensible young lady when I see one. But I have interrupted your work long enough, and as you will want to finish it by three to-morrow, I'll wish you good-night."

Aida followed the man to the door and returned his bow.

Then she heard him go down the stair until his footsteps gradually faded out, seemingly far away.

"That is a strange adventure," thought the girl, going slowly back to her work-table. "I can't get rid of the idea that took possession of me the moment I opened the door and saw him at the step. He may be Riley Dwyer to some people, but to others he is some one else. I can't dismiss the belief. He will come here to-morrow promptly at three; he will renew his offer and his importunities. If he is Riley Dwyer, why has he sought me out for his wife's seamstress? There are other women in New York—thousands of them—who know as much as I do about fine work, and they are easier reached than I. But he climbs two flights of dark stairs—he passes the homes of the best dressmakers in the city to engage me. Why?"

Aida appeared to have puzzled herself with a question of her own making.

She threw herself upon her chair and pushed the work away.

"No more to-night!" she exclaimed, addressing it.

Then she thought and thought till her head ached and her brain seemed to whirl.

After awhile she took up her task again, and the song of the sewing-machine filled the room once more.

"This doesn't mend matters!" exclaimed Aida, and the noise ceased as suddenly as she had started it. "I am no nearer the solution than I was an hour ago. I can't sew and think."

She took the dress from under the needle and laid it away.

"I wish Phil were here to help me with his advice. I would like to tell him all about my visitor. Something tells me that he ought to know," and the echo "ought to know" appeared to come back to her from every side of the room.

Riley Dwyer, as he called himself, had been gone an hour when Aida locked her door from the outside and went down the stairs to the street.

This was an unusual proceeding for her, for she was seldom on the streets of New York after dark and it was eight o'clock now.

Nobody saw the pretty seamstress glide away, therefore no one followed her.

She walked rapidly a long distance, not for the purpose of saving car fare, but to prevent being recognized.

At length she turned into an open hallway on Broadway, and at the head of a flight of steps she rapped lightly but with eagerness on a door.

Aida held her breath while she waited for a response, and when she was on the edge of despair the knob was turned.

"In the name of fortune, Aida, what brings you here?" exclaimed the man, who stared at her as she stepped into the little office-like room.

"I thought I would startle you," smiled the girl. "I want to tell you about my visitor. You ought to know, Captain Phil, and I must decide an important question by three o'clock to-morrow."

Aida was in the genteel sleuth's quarters for the first time, and a shudder stole over her when she thought that she stood on the scene of the mysterious tragedy of which the living victim at the hospital could tell nothing.

Phil Fox felt that something important had brought the girl to his office at that hour. She would not come on a foolish errand.

If she had had a visitor he must have been an important one.

"I am ready now, and you are eager," smiled the detective when Aida had rested a few moments.

Without further delay she gave the detective the full details of Riley Dwyer's visit, his offer, his eagerness and his manner. She described him so well that he seemed to stand photographed before the New York sleuth.

"Now, what shall I do?" eagerly questioned Aida at the conclusion of her narrative.

"Go!" said Phil Fox, sententiously. "By all means go. You can do the chase a service under that man's roof."

"But who is he?"

"I'll break the puzzle, Aida. Riley Dwyer is Mr. Tully Trenck."

CHAPTER XII.

ON THE ALERT.

"TULLY TRENCK!" cried Aida falling back while her countenance showed the extent of her surprise. "Why, that is the man who was Monckton Musgrave's friend so long, the only person who was with him when he died, and—"

"Go on, Aida," said the detective as the young girl paused.

"And the man who expected to be benefited by his will. Is it possible that I have had a call from that schemer and that you advise me to accept his offer, to become a resident under his roof?"

"I repeat the advice," was the reply. "I want you to say 'I accept' when Riley Dwyer comes to-morrow at three for your answer. This is a play unlooked for, but I am not the man to push it aside. There is something deep behind Tully Trenck's visit, Aida. The man is a most cunning rascal. He lives two if not three lives in this city, and thinks nobody is the wiser for it. Yes, you go with Riley Dwyer when he comes."

"If you say this, I go," Aida said.

"While under his roof you must keep eyes and ears open," continued Phil, the sleuth. "I don't think you will be required to remain there long. I trust not."

"But does he know that I am the beneficiary of the will that was stolen from Leon on the street?"

"Tully Trenck ought to know," answered the detective rather mysteriously. "A man who occupies the position he does, should not be ignorant of some things."

"What sort of a wife has the rascal got?"

"You will discover through acquaintance. I leave that to you."

"But you know her?"

Phil Fox smiled.

"I used to know Tully Trenck's wife," said he.

"But now he is Riley Dwyer and may have quite a different woman."

"I see," laughed Aida. "As you say, I will find out her good qualities through personal acquaintance."

"I will call on you to-morrow, some time in the forenoon, and give you full instructions. To-night I have other work on hand," and the gentleman spotter ended by glancing at his watch.

Aida Armstrong had the New York detective for company nearly the entire distance home.

"One of the strongest and bravest men in New York!" was her mental ejaculation when she saw him vanish round a corner leaving her to finish her walk alone. "He realizes the dangers that attend the trail he is on. I am willing to throw up my claim to the property left me by the stolen will for my persecuted mother's sake, in order to take him off the track, but he will not hear to such a thing. The men who robbed Leon knew that Monckton Musgrave had made restitution as far as lay in his power. Heaven knows how they made the discovery, but if they had not known why the theft? What a deep, dark game this is! The theft was followed by the death of the man robbed of his will. He died of a disease that baffled the skill of the best physicians of New York. There was no pain, no mental worry as far as could be seen. It was a gradually sinking which the skill of medicine could not check. Tully Trenck, his partner, was away all the time. He could not be found though they telegraphed everywhere for him. But he came back on the very day of the theft and death. How did that happen? Was it merely a coincidence? Or did he know, and come back thinking that he was Musgrave's sole heir? It is very strange; it is too deep for me."

Aida was once more in her little room on the third floor, and Phil Fox of whom she thought—

Where was he?

In imagination she saw the detective threading the streets of Gotham now alone like a flitting weasel, now with a man at his heels.

Sometimes the latter vision would become so real that the girl would utter a cry of warning and start at the sound of her own voice to find herself shut up in her humble quarters.

"If they touch the man who hunts for me—if they turn on Phil Fox as they turned on Sam Sharpe, may the gods smite the uplifted hand,

before it falls. He is trying to vindicate my mother. He is after the perpetrators of a base double crime and if he fails through their devilish machinations I may turn avenger myself."

At that moment the well-known face of the New York ferret appeared above a cot in a hospital ward. A soft light fell over the pale face of a man who occupied the bed, and for several minutes the detective studied it with deep anxiety and solicitude in his look.

The patient was asleep.

"What are the chances now?" asked Phil Fox, turning to a professional-looking man who came up.

"There is no change," was the reply.

Phil looked at the patient again and his hands closed firmly almost fiercely at his sides.

"Have you repeated the experiment of getting something from him through the medium of the writing board?" put the detective.

"We have."

"Well?"

"He seems to have forgotten the events of that night. It is one of the famous cases of the hospital."

"Police Surgeon Bovier said it would be."

"I never saw one like it, though I've read of them."

"What was the result?"

"Out of ten such cases reported in my journals, but one ever recovered his memory, and he did not retain it long."

Detective Phil looked down at Sam Sharpe once more.

"Physically, the man is getting well?" he suddenly said.

"Yes, sir. We will discharge him inside of two weeks. I never saw wounds heal with such rapidity. I wish we could say as much for him otherwise."

A few moments longer the genteel sleuth stood at the cot, then he bent down and held his ear close to Sam's lips.

"The breathing is normal, sir. As I have said, if you want him at the end of two weeks, you shall have him," the doctor said.

"I want him!" was the prompt reply, and as the detective stepped back he said, with emphasis: "Remember! when that man is able to leave the hospital, I want him."

Phil Fox was soon swallowed up by the city whose roar had not been locked up by the keys of night.

He went back to his little room on the second floor, but came out presently, not in his usual garb, but wearing the clothes of a rough-and-ready citizen of the disreputable wards.

He went from his rooms almost straight to Mag Manacle's.

Passing across the threshold, the keen detective took a seat at one of the tables and caught the woman's eye as soon as possible.

Mag came up without the least suspicion in her mind as to the identity of her guest, and took his order as she had taken half a hundred like it since sundown.

While she was gone, Phil Fox studied the occupants of the room.

There were perhaps twenty of these, men dressed, for the most part, like himself. He knew that in the whole lot there was probably not one who was not guilty of some crime, from the theft of a pocketbook to the darkest deed in the catalogue of villainy.

Mag came back with his bottle of light wine, and as he felt for the change he beckoned the woman to draw nearer.

"Can I have the private room a few moments?" the detective asked, and just then he held up in his hand the price of the wine, along with the fee usually paid for the quiet apartment.

Mag Manacle shook her head.

"I'm sorry to say, sir, that it is occupied just now," said she.

"Ho! then I can't do my writing here. When will the room be at your disposal, Mag?"

"Before long, maybe," was the reply. "I can't say when, you see, for I don't know how long the gentlemen—"

Mag caught herself.

"I mean I can't say how long the room will be occupied," she finished.

Detective Phil did not appear to notice the woman's blunder, but regretted his inability to get the room, and paid her for the wine.

As Mag withdrew he settled himself back in the chair, with the soft slouch hat pulled partly over his eyes, and sipped the liquor with the air of a person who had a good deal of leisure on his hands.

"Occupied, eh?" he exclaimed. "I know that Bobolink isn't there asleep at the table, for he is safe enough at the Tombs, as certainly booked for Sing Sing as though he had his sentence to keep him company. I cannot say who occupy the secret room just at this particular time, but Mag caught herself saying 'gentlemen,' and that makes the number plural. I know who counseled there a short time ago—the night before the great robbery. I wonder if that trio have come together again?"

While the detective discussed his wine, which was of an inferior quality, like everything Mag sold, there was a constant coming and going in the room.

Men went out, and men came in, and he did not miss a single one.

An hour passed away, and then a finger fell upon his shoulder from behind.

The New York sleuth looked up and saw the proprietress of the den.

"The room, sir. Do you want it?" both announced and asked Mag.

"Not now," replied the spotter. "It is empty, I presume?"

"It is at my disposal. I'm sorry I could not accommodate you when you first came, but first come, first served, you know," and the Amazon walked off at the boisterous call of a customer at the other end of the room.

"Gone! Skipped out like weasels!" laughed Phil Fox to himself, and a moment later he abandoned his half-drained bottle of wine and left the house.

If the last occupants of the secret room had departed just before Mag made the announcement, they could not be far away.

Phil Fox was soon on the street.

As he passed the first stone in front of the door he was jostled by a man at whom he looked with a keen but searching glance.

At the same time the man turned and looked at him.

"He doesn't know me!" thought the city sleuth. "If he has just left the house something fetches him back. I want no better thing than this." And turning on his heel with the coolness of a man of his kind, he followed the den's latest customer across the step.

Back into the room he had just left went Phil Fox, the gentleman spotter.

The man he had seen was just ahead of him, and they entered the large room nearly together.

Phil took a seat at the first table, and Mag spied him with a laugh as she held up his abandoned bottle.

"Yes, another just like it," he called with a smile, and Mag vanished.

Then he threw a glance from under the slouch hat toward the person he had followed back into the place.

Already two black eyes were fastened upon him, and as the detective looked he laughed to himself.

"Do you think you know me to-night, Kit Kline? If you don't you will before long."

CHAPTER XIII.

MAG'S SECRET GUESTS.

THE man who had jostled the city spotter on the sidewalk and pushed his way into Mag Manacle's establishment was the redoubtable Kit himself.

The disguise he wore on this occasion was not enough to prevent recognition by Phil Fox, and while he took his liquor uneasily threw swift looks around the room and often toward the door as if he expected some one.

He was not long in seeing the detective.

At first he thought he had discovered an enemy, but the longer he looked the less he thought so, and at length he came to the conclusion that the man was one of Mag's regular visitors who had no designs against him.

Kit sat alone at his table for some minutes.

He had ordered a cigar along with his drink, and having disposed of one he fell to enjoying the other.

"The fellow has given me up. He doesn't know me," said Detective Phil to himself. "What! is he going off already? No! some one has beckoned to him from your door. It is Mag herself."

The following second Kit's table was vacated and the convict had reached a door which led to another part of the house.

It was Mag Manacle who had caused Kit to stir, for the sleuth caught a glimpse of her at the door, but she vanished while he looked.

In an instant the jail-bird was gone.

"That was pretty well done," mentally exclaimed the ferret. "Mag lets on that she neither warns nor betrays any one. I don't know about that from what I've just witnessed. I'll wait a little longer and see."

Presently the giantess marched back into the room, and Phil called her to his table.

"I'll take the private room now, if you please, Mag," said he.

The woman started slightly.

"I'm sorry, but it's taken," she stammered.

"Just taken, eh?"

"Yes."

Mag seemed to speak before she thought, but she did not attempt to correct herself as she had done once before that night.

"Taken? Of course it is," thought Phil.

"Kit Kline has gone to a conference with some one in that room. The rascals know that they made a blunder in my office. They struck the wrong man as they will learn to their sorrow when this game is played out."

The New York ferret would have given a good deal to have looked into the secret chamber at that moment. He was not going to betray his identity to Mag Manacle, nor would he seek at her hands the privilege he desired to enjoy.

Mag prided herself on the oft-repeated boast

that she never betrayed her customers, and her adherence to this trait of character was what drew her the custom she enjoyed.

Detective Fox lingered over his second bottle of inferior claret hoping that the door of the private room would open and discharge its tenants.

He wanted to see with whom Kit Kline was closeted for he was confident that the arrival of some one had taken the convict from the man's room.

If Mag could have been bribed he would have seen three men seated at the table in the middle of the little chamber.

The dirty lamp with the dirty chimney was doing service as before, and threw the shadows of the men on the walls.

Kit Kline of course was one of the three, another was Barry Black, or "Black Barry," and the third—well, the third was the third man of our first chapter—Mr. Muggles.

"You see where we are," said Muggles, leaning toward Kit though he addressed both men.

"If the Broadway sleuth strikes the scent, and he seems to be working to that end, there will be some lively work."

"Confound it! the mistake was made when Kit—"

The hand of the convict dropped upon the table in a significant manner, and Black Barry stopped the instant he caught his eye.

"Could you have done better?" came through Kit's teeth, and the look that accompanied the words was not a pleasant one. "You must recollect that I saw this human sleuth-bound but once, and that was after night on the street. I did the best I could. Let that be dropped."

"Of course, of course," interposed Muggles who was afraid that Barry had stirred up some bad blood. "It wasn't such a bad job after all. Indeed, I call it a lucky hit, for the man who got it was a spy—a tracker of men—and might have proved dangerous sometime. They say that he knows nothing about the occurrence, that he will remain in this blissful condition all his life. By Jove! I don't call that bad," and Mr. Muggles chuckled in a way that seemed to give him infinite pleasure.

"What could he tell if he knew?" snapped Kit. "He didn't see anything that would give the hounds any clue. The person who waited for him was no chump."

"Of course not," said Barry as if the last words were directed specially at him. "I only say that I wish it had been the master instead of the man. We've got to do another act, that's all."

"Barry is right," spoke Muggles who showed a pair of intensely black eyes above a dark beard. "We can't afford to have the nose of this sleuth along the trail. He is absolutely dangerous."

All at once Kit Kline fell back in his chair and thrust his thumbs into the arm-holes of his vest.

"I'm not afraid of him," said he complacently.

"But you said once in my hearing that you wanted to measure arms with the detective," put in Muggles.

"Oh, I can postpone the day," went on Kit in an off-hand manner. "You see," to Muggles, "he isn't particularly annoying us just now. We are here enjoying the freedom of a little council. Why, sir, I can wait for the tussle with this man."

"And while you wait he will pounce down upon you like an eagle."

"Phil Fox, eh?"

"Philip Fox."

Kit laughed.

"But I'm going away. What do I care what becomes of the game hereafter?" he suddenly cried, turning to Muggles, but with a lightning glance at Black Barry which that individual seemed to understand perfectly.

"I didn't think you'd run from a shadow, Kit Kline," and Mr. Muggles spoke with some bitterness.

"From whose shadow?" cried the convict, removing his thumbs and darting forward as a sudden frown darkened his brow.

"From the detective's."

For a moment an outburst of rage was threatened, but Kit Kline choked it off, and answered in chosen words, that cut like double-edged knives:

"Shadows seem to frighten other people just now. The detective may catch somebody besides Kit Kline, and the doors of a cell, darker than any Sing Sing possesses, may open for a person whose name is—well, I won't mention it here."

The face of Muggles, livid at the end of Kit Kline's first sentence, was colorless when he finished.

"You don't want to threaten me!" he stammered.

"I threaten no one. I just made a remark," and the convict appeared to smile at the sudden consternation he had caused. "If you make it an inducement, I won't go. I'll stay and fix things for you. I admit that a blunder was made, but it hasn't turned out so badly. We have but one man to deal with where we had two before."

"But that one man is a host," Black Barry put in.

"Yes, a host and no mistake. Phil Fox is the sleuth of the metropolis—cool, daring, ingenious, tireless. I heard of him long before I set foot in New York. I've seen a dozen men whom he ran down—this sleek ferret who wears kids on Broadway, and who can wear rags with the same grace in the beggars' alleys. That man is against us; he would like to lay his hands on the papers the young man lost at Broadway and Pine, and there are a few other points he would like to pick up. He is better than the man you have hired."

"I?" exclaimed Mr. Muggles.

"Yes," grinned Kit. "Phil Fox is worth a thousand Baldimore Bryces. You've picked up the right fellow to help you through the game. He hunts secrets and men with a brass band. If you want New York to know that Mr. Bryce is in your employ, it will know it."

Mr. Muggles was nettled by words like these. He wondered where Kit Kline obtained his information, but he said nothing.

"Let us come to it," he remarked a little later. "If you want to go, you can."

He spoke to the convict who looked at him with an expression of surprise.

"I did not say I had to go."

"No, of course not. The bargain was that the way was to be clear before the last settlement was made. There is still an obstacle in the path."

"The detective?" asked Kit.

Mr. Muggles nodded.

"Oh, you want every straw swept aside, I see!" cried the convict.

"Such was the contract."

"Then, by heavens! I'll do it—Barry and I will, I mean—in a manner that'll give you no chance to quibble."

"That is just what I want."

"Don't you want the man in the hospital silenced too?"

"He is that already."

"The doctors say so."

"But you have said that he could tell nothing even if he found his tongue."

"That is true; but he may have seen something before he came back to the office. I don't know what kind of a trail he was on. I meant to say that he could not betray the person who met him in the office."

"Let him go. I'm willing to take the doctor's opinion of the case. I want the main bound on the trail."

Kit Kline's eyes caught fire as he bent forward and looked Muggles in the face.

"You shall have him! I know him now. I am somewhat familiar with his disguises, and between Barry and I he has no more chance to live long than a spider has in Holland! There! let that settle it!"

The man called Muggles looked into the cruel face of the convict, and read merciless determination there.

He did not think that while he had employed the two villains to perpetrate crime for him, he had placed himself completely in their power; nor that if they fell into the hands of justice, they would not scruple to drag him down.

Shortly after Kit's last words Mag was called in, and an extra bottle of wine finished the conference.

Several minutes later the three let themselves quietly out of the house, and a pair of waiting eyes picked them up one by one.

Kit and Barry went off together, while Muggles glided away alone.

"I don't want the two jailbirds now," exclaimed the man who gave the pair a parting glance. "Some new devilry has been set afoot to-night—another new move on the chess-board of rascality and crime. I have business with the third man just now. Were I to call him Muggles he would respond to the name with a start; but I could startle him still more by whispering another name at his ear. I won't do that to-night, however—no, not to-night."

Mr. Muggles had a quick gait, though a quiet one, and so unsuspecting was he on this occasion, that he did not once look over his shoulder.

Not far behind him walked a man who never lost a trail when once struck—Phil Fox of Gotham.

CHAPTER XIV.

IN THE SPIDER'S WEB.

PROMPTLY at three o'clock the next day Riley Dwyer presented himself to Aida in her airy lodgings.

The girl had had a visit from the detective during the forenoon, and was ready for Mr. Dwyer when he came.

This being the case, it did not take the two long to make a bargain, and when the man went away he was accompanied by the seamstress of New York.

Aida could not get over the revelation that Riley Dwyer was Tully Trenck—the man who expected to profit by Monckton Musgrave's death, and the only person in the room when he died.

She could not understand why he was masquerading under another name, but she had been told by the Broadway ferret that her duty

in the house to which she was going would be to find out.

Riley Dwyer was very talkative during the ride from Aida's lodgings to 906 T— street, where he lived.

He asked the girl numerous questions about herself, but she was careful not to tell him too much.

When the vehicle stopped in front of a rather plain two-story brick house painted brown, Riley Dwyer opened the door and announced the end of the journey.

Aida found herself in a strange part of the city. The street was wide and quiet, so different from the quarter she had left.

She was conducted into the house, where she was left alone till her conductor could summon Mrs. Dwyer.

The young girl felt a strange fear take possession of her now, and for a moment she regretted her step; but when she thought of the cause that had prompted her to take it, she took new courage and resolved to go to the end.

"If this man is Tully Trenck, I have cause for hating him, for my mother often said that his hand was against her, and helped to imbitter her life."

In a little while there were footsteps and the rustle of a dress at the door and Aida looked around, to see a woman about thirty-five, not very tall, but good-looking.

"Ah! you have come, my dear," exclaimed the woman, coming forward with extended hand. "I was afraid Mr. Dwyer would fail. But I see he has secured your services, and I am much rejoiced."

While the speaker rattled on in this manner, Aida had a good chance to study her and she improved it.

"So this is Mrs. Dwyer, is it?" thought the pretty seamstress. "This is the woman whom I am to watch while I am in this house. My opinion is that she will bear watching, for—"

Here Mrs. Dwyer broke in upon Aida's thoughts with a lot of chatter that quite put her opinions to flight, and almost before she knew it she had been installed "one of the family" as the woman said.

During the afternoon Aida was shown the rich goods which she was expected to work on.

Mr. Dwyer himself kept at a respectful distance. His wife said that he was attending to some important business down-town, though the girl did not more than half believe the statement.

The truth was that Riley Dwyer was in the house at the time. Once or twice Aida heard cat-steps over head as if some one was walking across the floor in slippers, but still heavily enough to make vibrations in the parlor below.

Of course the person up-stairs was Riley Dwyer.

"You greatly interest me, my dear," suddenly exclaimed Mrs. Dwyer, who had been watching Aida like a hawk while she arranged the goods she had been inspecting. "My husband tells me that you are an orphan."

"I am," answered Aida.

"It is a hard lot, of course, but one learns to bear it after a spell. You have been a seamstress a long time, I presume."

"Ever since my mother's death."

"Your father, then, was in moderate circumstances?"

"He was. He died when I was a child."

"And left your mother nothing at all?"

A sudden light shone from the girl's eyes, and her lips trembled.

"My mother—"

She almost bit her lip to keep back the sentence which seemed bent on forcing itself out.

"My mother lived some years after father's death, and while we never had much of this world's goods, we managed to get along."

"Comfortably?"

"Comfortably."

"Then you never wanted much?"

"No."

Mrs. Dwyer raised her eyes toward the ceiling, and appeared to receive certain instructions from a portion of it, for she turned quickly to the girl and continued.

"As you had nothing to look for, my dear, you had no will to lose," said she.

It was a strange twist in the conversation, but Aida did not betray herself.

"I don't quite understand you," she replied.

"Oh! haven't you heard?" cried Mrs. Dwyer surprised.

"Heard of what?" meekly and innocently asked Phil Fox's pretty spy.

"Why, I thought everybody had heard of that. Why the stolen will, my child—the one that was taken from the young private secretary the other day somewhere on lower Broadway."

"I am almost ashamed to confess my ignorance of such startling news," smiled Aida.

"You must remember that I live alone, that I go and come but seldom, and that the only news I get is that which pertains to the science of dressmaking. Was there really a will taken?"

"Indeed there was."

"In broad daylight?" asked the girl.

"Yes."

"Of course they caught the rogue."

"Of course they caught no one!" exclaimed Mrs. Dwyer. "Can it be possible that you have heard nothing of all this? Why the papers have been full of it."

"I am almost isolated from the world where I live."

"You must be. And I presume you go away and would not be missed?"

The last sentence was supplemented by a laugh in which Mrs. Dwyer displayed two rows of pearly teeth.

Aida replied to this sally that she presumed she could vanish without being looked for by a single soul in the metropolis.

The answer seemed to satisfy Mrs. Dwyer who sent another glance toward the ceiling—a glance which the girl did not fail to catch.

"Did you ever hear of Monckton Musgrave?" suddenly resumed Mrs. Dwyer.

The name was enough to make the cunning girl start but she had nerved herself for any turn the interview might take.

"I don't know the gentleman," she replied.

"Know him? Of course not, my dear. I thought you may have heard of the name."

Aida shook her head.

"Did you ever hear your mother mention it?" The girl seemed to reflect.

"Ah! once or twice. I remember it now. Monckton Musgrave! That is the name, sure enough." And Aida looked at Mrs. Dwyer and waited for her to proceed.

"What did your mother say of him?"

"I'm sure I cannot tell. It was years and years ago."

"Did she like the man?"

"She never spoke of him enough to let me form an opinion."

The wife of Riley Dwyer appeared to rest her case, for Aida heard no more about the street robbery or Monckton Musgrave.

After awhile she was the sole tenant of the room, and when the hour for tea arrived she was invited to a small table at the end of which was a turned-down plate.

Mrs. Dwyer apologized for her husband's absence by saying that business detained him down-town.

She said this with the nonchalance of a finished actress, and even while she spoke Aida thought she heard the cat-tread overhead.

"Into what sort of a house have I come?" ejaculated the young girl when she found herself in the room on the second floor to which she had been conducted by Mrs. Dwyer and then bidden good-night. "Why all those questions about my mother, myself, the stolen will and Monckton Musgrave? Do they want to know whether I know what was coming to me, or whether I am ignorant of the whole past? I begin to see why Phil Fox the sleuth was so anxious to have me with Mr. and Mrs. Riley Dwyer. But does he realize whether his advice has brought me? Leon would not have advised me to come, but it is for the cause and I will do my part if it costs me life itself. There must be justice and vengeance one of these days."

Aida could not close her eyes in the strange house. She heard the hours tolled off by a clock which was somewhere in the neighborhood, and after the strokes the house would become as silent as a grave.

It was growing late when the girl caught the sound of voices proceeding from somewhere.

She went to the door and listened.

They were below, probably in the parlor where she had the singular interview with Mrs. Dwyer, but when Aida remembered that she was up-stairs in that part of the house furthest from the parlor she thought that the voices could not proceed from there.

Softly and slowly Aida unlocked her door and listened in the hall.

It was midnight, for the unseen clock had just struck twelve, and the hall leading to the stair was quite gloomy.

Eager to hear the voices again the seamstress of New York crept down the corridor till she found the banisters and then she leaned over them and listened again.

"Don't you know that you play with fire when you fool with those men?" came up to her in a woman's tones from somewhere down below.

"I guess I have them with as hard a grip as they can have me," was the answer, and immediately a thought flashed through the girl's mind.

"That is Riley Dwyer!" she exclaimed.

The man's answer was met by a derisive laugh.

"Do you think that?" followed the sound of laughter. "Do you really suppose that those men would hesitate to throw you to the whale to save themselves?"

"I will risk it. I keep him a little while longer. The blunder he made the other night is overcome by the silence of the man laid up in the hospital."

"But that man is not the one who is left. The spy is not the master sleuth."

"He is one out of the way, anyhow!" was the answer and although Aida could not see the speaker his tones told her that the words gave him infinite satisfaction.

"Think so, if you will. But unless the other

one goes speedily the million will never touch our hands despite the cool cards we have played for it."

"Well, it will reach us very soon. You have not congratulated me on my luck to-day. You admit that she would shine well as Monckton Musgrave's heiress, but you don't seem to think of the *finesse* that brought her here."

"You did your work well. I congratulate you now if it gives you pleasure. My opinion is that the girl is not as innocent as you think."

Aida started.

"Not as innocent as I think, eh?" was the answer. "Then, by heaven! I will strike soon and powerfully. The paper is finished. We have only to clear the way, then—then, Irene, the game is won!"

The dressmaker of Gotham uttered a strange cry.

Irene?

Then the woman below was Irene Nims, the person who was supposed to have sailed for Europe on the Scotia!

CHAPTER XV.

THE WEB TIGHTENS.

"I HAVE one secret already!" thought Aida to herself when this revelation burst upon her in all its startling light. "Irene Nims, Monckton Musgrave's last housekeeper in this house with Riley Dwyer or Tully Trenck! I begin to see how dark, deep and damnable the game is. Some woman sailed in the Scotia. She goes under the name of Irene Nims but she is not the true Irene. That woman is down below."

The voices had ceased by this time, and shortly afterward Aida crept back to her room.

She had discovered more than she had bargained for, and her mind was filled with exciting thoughts.

By and by a soft footstep approached her door. It resembled the cat-like tread she had heard before since coming to the house, and she at once conjectured that some one was playing spy.

For several minutes the owner of the footsteps seemed to be listening at her door, but the girl maintained a strict silence and at last they went back and passed out of hearing in the gloomy corridor.

It was a spy sure enough, and if the young dressmaker could have followed the steps she would have seen Riley Dwyer enter a room where a woman sat at a table upon which stood several delicate goblets and a bottle of wine.

"The beauty of the web is in dreamland," grinned the man as he caught the woman's eye. "She may not be as innocent as I think, but I am sure she doesn't think it worth while to keep her eyes open in this house to-night, so, like a good girl, she has gone to bed."

We leave the reader to imagine what would have happened if the speaker had known that Aida already held possession of an important secret.

"Now, look here. I want to show you something," continued Riley Dwyer, taking a packet from his pocket, and displaying it to the woman who looked for all the world like Irene Nims. "It is completed, and is the masterpiece of the person who had the work in hand."

He drew a chair up to the table and opened the paper which he pushed toward his companion for her inspection.

"What do you think of that?" he cried, exultingly.

As he watched the woman he saw her eyes light up with beams of delight, and then she turned her face upon him.

"It looks excellent," said she.

"It is superb! Nothing like it, I tell you. It will win us the game. It cannot help doing so. The other papers that will be found with it will settle the matter. Irene, we are at the door that leads to the million. I haven't waited for nothing."

Then he reached across the table and took up the paper which he looked at with a triumphant expression on his face.

"It is grandly done if I do say it myself. Tomorrow is the day for the stroke," he exclaimed. "My man understands his business, and the fee he is to get will be paid promptly according to the agreement. He needn't hunt men any more, and I don't think he will. Ah! Irene, there's more ways than one to get a fortune even after one has slipped through your fingers."

He laughed heartily over his own words and poured out two goblets of wine which he and the woman emptied after clinking the glasses together in a mutual pledge of success.

Out in the upper hall bending over the banister and with her bright eyes seeing the whole proceeding through the half open transom of the door was the figure of Aida Armstrong.

Phil Fox's spy was still on the alert, but at the risk of life itself.

She had come to the strange house for the purpose of getting at its secrets, and her resolution had been to know them all before she gave up the work.

The stealthy footsteps did not come back to Aida's door again that night, and the next

morning when she went down she found Mrs. Dwyer in the best of humor.

She reported that her husband had gone down-town to complete some very important business which he had not been able to finish the day before, and Aida, who knew that she was listening to a well-coined falsehood, made no remarks.

As she had made several discoveries which she wanted to place in the detective's hands she resolved to leave the house for a spell.

Her instructions had been so full that she knew exactly what to do, and shortly after breakfast she told Mrs. Dwyer that she would take a little walk before beginning her work.

In an instant the woman started and looked sharply almost fiercely at Aida.

"The morning air in this part of the city is not good," she exclaimed. "I never care to breathe it, therefore I do not indulge in any strolls. Later in the day we will seek purer atmosphere away from this locality."

But Aida persisted in her intention modestly but with considerable firmness; but she found her mistress obdurate.

"Is it possible that she suspects?" mentally exclaimed the girl. "If she does I am in a trap from which there may be no escape. There is no telling the lengths to which Tully Trenck will go, for with a dead man's millions in the scale he will play a rascal's full hand."

The detective's spy did not go back to the subject of the walk when she found Mrs. Dwyer, or Irene Nims, so set against it.

She could not afford to raise the woman's suspicions.

"My husband is greatly interested in you," resumed Irene, for we can call the woman by her right name, since her identity has been made known. "He thinks he has heard of your mother, and—"

Aida, who was bending over a piece of rich goods, raised her eyes so suddenly that the speaker stopped.

"He cannot have known her. It is impossible!" cried Aida. "My mother made few acquaintances."

"Mr. Dwyer thinks he was one of the favored few. When he comes back from down-town he wishes to speak with you about an important matter."

"Very well," answered the girl, and then Irene left the room, and she was alone.

"Wants to see me?" murmured Aida. "Yes, Tully Trenck knows much about my mother. He knows of the insults she suffered at the hands of his friend, who died the other day, just after his will was stolen on the street. In that will he tried to make reparation. He left his wealth to me, but I cannot prove it. The will is lost; stolen it was by the men who are playing a cool game for gold. Not only that, but a still darker crime preceded the theft of the document. Phil Fox is on the trail, and he never fails."

Five minutes afterward Aida had occasion to return to her room on the upper floor.

As she was in the hall returning, a door at her left opened suddenly, and she found herself face to face with Riley Dwyer.

The man started at sight of the girl, and Aida could not suppress the exclamation of surprise that rose to her lips.

This was the man who had gone down-town on unfinished business. Instead of being there, he was in his own house.

The dressmaker of Gotham spoke to the astonished man in the door, and hurried downstairs before she could be detained.

She was followed by Riley Dwyer, but no further than the foot of the steps.

The following moment he appeared to Irene Nims who was in a small room alone.

"Did you tell her that I was down-town?" he asked, his face pale and his hands shaking like aspen leaves.

"Yes. I—I—"

"Woman, you have ruined the game!"

Irene fell back and her white hands clutched a chair for support.

"My God! what has happened?" she gasped.

"Quite enough to send hands at once to the swan-like throat in the parlor!" hissed the man. "She has seen me. She knows that I am in the house when you took pains to tell her that I was not."

For a second Irene Nims stood at the chair. Her color changed several times under the workings of thought and passion, and she was closely watched by the man who appeared anxious to know what she would do.

"If this has happened, we must act at once," said Irene at last, and she spoke like a woman who had deliberately formed a stern resolution. "I am confirmed in my opinion expressed last night that she knows more than you gave her credit for knowing. Long after you were in bed, I crept up to her room in my stocking feet. I found the key in the door, completely shutting out a view from that point, so I drew myself up and looked into the room through the transom. It was past midnight. I remember that while I hung there the clock struck three. The girl was not asleep, but, on the contrary, she was writing at the table with the light barely high enough to let her see. I saw her finish the note and seal it, after which she placed it in her bosom. What do you think of that? A girl—"

and that girl especially—who writes letters in this house at three o'clock in the morning is nobody's fool."

Riley Dwyer hung spell-bound on the words that fell from Irene's lips.

"You told me nothing about this this morning," cried he.

"No. I was going to keep my discovery secret for a while in order to watch her. She wanted to walk out after breakfast—for what? To post that letter—her report. You have brought a Tartar to the house!" And Irene laughed.

"Then the Tartar feels the screws!" was the quick retort, and the man's eyes appeared to catch fire. "Do you think the letter is where she put it this morning?"

"It undoubtedly is."

"I want it," and Riley Dwyer leaned toward the woman with a look of determination. "We must strike now the blow we had set for the future. The girl is in the parlor. You are her mistress. I want that letter right away!"

Irene Nims started forward and answered with four words which she sent through her teeth.

"You shall have it!"

A second afterward she crossed the room, and Riley Dwyer saw her vanish.

"She's worth her weight in gold!" he laughed. As for Irene, she entered the parlor and walked straight to Aida, already busy at work. The dressmaker heard her step, and looked up.

"I want the letter, my dear," and Irene Nims's hand dropped upon Aida's shoulder.

The words and the look which accompanied them sent a thrill through Phil Fox's spy.

"The letter?" she echoed, assuming a look of innocence.

"Yes—the one you carry in your bosom!"

The work dropped from Aida's hands, and the next instant she stood erect before Irene Nims in a quickly assumed attitude of defense.

"Come! come! don't try to play a game of bluff!" exclaimed Irene. "The letter I want was finished at three o'clock this morning. I'll take it now!"

The following second Aida found herself struggling in the grip of a woman who seemed to possess the strength of a giantess, and when she was flung across the room with a triumphant cry, she saw Irene Nims holding the prize above her head—the letter intended for the detective of New York.

CHAPTER XVI.

A RIVAL SLEUTH'S LUCK.

"WELL, you must confess yourself beaten this time, Captain Fox. The man who has the name of following clews with a brass band has reached the game. You have heard of course?"

It was getting late in the afternoon of the day that ushered in the startling episode which closes the foregoing chapter, and the young man who talked in exciting tones to the Gotham sleuth in the latter's office was Leon Larimore, the private secretary.

"Who has found the game, Leon?" asked Phil Fox, smiling at the young man's excitement.

"Baldimore Bryce, the detective into whose hands I fell immediately after the robbery of the will."

"What has he found?"

"The packet and its contents."

An incredulous light shone from the detective's eyes.

"Where did you get this news, Leon?"

"On the street."

"Is it current there?"

"Not very current yet. It will be shortly, though, as a mention of it is in the *Telegram*, second edition."

"This is news, sure enough," observed Detective Phil. "Fortune has smiled on Baldimore Bryce for once."

Leon took a paper from his pocket and threw it upon the desk in front of the Broadway spotter.

"You can see for yourself, sir," said he.

Phil Fox opened the sheet to the city news, and soon found the following paragraph:

"DETECTIVE TRIUMPH."

"It is reported that Detective Bryce, of Lower Broadway, found to-day in an out-of-the-way place, the package which was stolen from young Larimore, private secretary to the late Monckton Musgrave of — street. The 'find' is said to be complete, and reflects much credit on Detective Bryce, who has been after it from the start. He has certainly stolen a march on his keen associates, and this triumph adds considerable to his other laurels."

"That looks like a paid puff," cried the detective. "But for all that, Bryce would not let such an announcement go out if he has found nothing."

"That is what I think," answered Leon. "I have heard several confirmations of that newspaper report on the street. It is worth looking after I think."

Phil Fox picked up his hat.

"By the way, what has become of Aida?" continued the young secretary.

"Isn't she at home?"

"No, sir."

"Did you knock?"

"I did, but received no reply. The door is locked; and from what I can gather from outside observation the apartments are deserted. I have been twice to the house to see Aida, but neither time could I get in."

"Something may have taken Aida away for a time," said Phil composedly.

"But would she remain away so long?" questioned the young man eagerly, and then he shook his head. "I cannot help thinking that the enemy has discovered her. If he has she is not safe."

"Don't let that trouble you, Leon," replied the New York spotter.

"But I can't help it. You know the state of affairs," and Leon flushed.

The two men left the office together and separated on the street below.

"Mr. Larimore, I believe?" suddenly asked a voice at Leon's elbow, as he halted at a corner not far away.

"Yes, sir," responded he as he turned and found himself face to face with a well-dressed individual whom he recognized as Baldimore Bryce, the detective.

"I thought so," continued that individual addressing Leon. "I presume you have heard of my good fortune?"

"I have seen the brief paragraph in the paper—nothing more."

Then Leon asked eagerly:

"Have you recovered the stolen property?"

"Every smidgin' of it!" ejaculated the detective proudly. "I believe you will say that not a thing is missing."

"Where is the packet?"

"For safe keeping I have deposited it in the safe of the Fidelity Trust Company."

Leon smiled.

"The documents were on their road thither when I lost them," observed the young man. "Can they be seen to-day?"

Baldimore Bryce consulted his watch.

"Not any more to-day, I am sorry to say," was the reply.

"The deposits are locked up till to-morrow. Then, Mr. Larimore, I would like to have your presence at my office, say at ten o'clock. Your identification of the packet will make my victory complete. You will be on hand of course, for you may be deeply interested in the proceedings."

Leon bowed.

"I am at a loss to know how you managed the matter when there was apparently no clew at all," said he.

"You say that naturally, young man. I have had an arduous task, but, starting out on a well-formed theory of my own, I stuck to the trail till it yielded me success. I regret," he went on, anticipating the inquiry that rose to Leon's lips. "I deeply regret that I was not able to nab the rascals as well as to find the property. But with the triumph we have achieved, we can afford to wait awhile. I was on the trail so hot that the villains dropped the spoils. To-morrow at ten, remember; my office. Come alone; I want your identification first of all."

Leon was about to ask another question, but the detective dropped him too suddenly for that, and walked off, leaving him to follow him with a look of amazement.

"That man is a blow-hard, but he may have stumbled upon the lost prize," Leon said to himself. "I wonder if Captain Phil has found out anything yet? I won't forget the hour, and I'll be on hand promptly to the minute. Not for the world hardly would I have Baldimore Bryce get ahead of a cool head like Phil Fox, the man who is hot on the greatest trail of the day."

He went up-town to the house which would be his abode till it was decided to whom it belonged.

It was known that nobody knew the contents of Musgrave's stolen will, though it was generally believed that his old friend Tully Trenck was his sole heir.

The secret which Aida Armstrong carried in her bosom, was not known to the city at large, and even if it had been told that an humble dressmaker on a third floor was the nabob's heir, it would have laughed in derision.

Leon went to the library where he turned on the gas, for the day was at an end, and when he had seated himself, a footstep disturbed him.

"You had a visitor while you were away," said a voice, which was that of a middle-aged woman, who attended to the house.

"Pray, who was he, Mary?" asked Leon.

"It was a woman, sir. She was so sure you would come soon that I invited her in, and she read books here in the library till half an hour ago."

"Why couldn't she have found a few more interesting chapters?"

"I don't know, I'm sure."

"What was she like?"

"She was a well-to-do woman, maybe thirty, as women's ages go. Looked like a widow, or tried to make believe so at any rate. She said she'd wait till you came, but when I dropped in to see how she was getting along, behold! she was gone!"

"She left no card, I presume."

"None; didn't even mention her name, nor say she would call again."

Leon looked up at the books, the arrangement of which was perfectly familiar to him. The housekeeper had withdrawn, and he was alone again.

"She was not idle while here, that is certain," he laughed to himself. "Her fingers were busy with the books. I see she has had all out on the second shelf; the removal of the dust tells me this much. A woman doesn't generally read heavy literature while waiting in a library."

Leon, by close examination, made the discovery that nearly every book in the case above the late owner's desk had been taken out.

He looked puzzled.

"I don't think the woman wanted to see me!" he suddenly exclaimed.

As he spoke he removed a few books from the second shelf and touched a secret spring which revealed a door in the woodwork.

"Did she find this?" went on Leon. "Was she looking for this niche where Musgrave used to keep some of his private papers?"

All at once he touched something in the opening, and the following moment he withdrew his hand and held between finger and thumb a lady's gold ring.

"Hol the mask is off!" cried he, as the polished surface of the circlet glistened in the light. "My visitor did not have to leave her card after leaving this. No, Irene Nims, you did not intend to wait for me. Your fear must have been that I would return and find you here."

Again and again Leon looked at the ring which proclaimed his visitor's identity as surely as if she had left her name on the dead man's desk.

He now knew that the former housekeeper had not sailed for Europe, no difference who had taken a first cabin passage as Mrs. Irene Nims.

The real Irene was still in the city; she had been in the library that very day, and for a purpose, too.

Leon sat down and placed the ring before him.

Then he went back and began at the beginning of the woman's sojourn in the house.

He remembered that she had secured the position of housekeeper on the recommendation of Tully Trenck, that she had been found up when all the inmates of the residence were supposed to be asleep.

Leon's mind got to picking up little incidents which had quite escaped it.

"Great God! if I think awhile longer I will weave a web about this woman that would startle the whole city!" he exclaimed as he sprang up, his dilated eyes glaring at the ring. "I see some things in a light that never shone on them till now. I recollect the night Monkton Musgrave fainted in his chamber for the first time. Irene Nims was with him when I came in. From that time he was never well. From that fatal hour the strange disease held him in its grip till the end came. I wish Captain Phil would drop in just now. I would like to open his eyes."

At that very moment the musical tones of the bell filled the hall, and Leon started off before they ceased.

Jerking open the front door he gave vent to an exclamation of surprise and joy, for the very man he wanted to see stood on the step—Phil Fox, the Spotter.

"The man of all the city's multitudes!—the very one I want!" cried Leon.

The detective came in and broke out in a laugh as he entered the library and dropped into a chair.

"You were right, Leon," he cried. "Baldimore Bryce has scored what he calls a triumph. To-morrow he will take from the safe of the Trust Company his find for identification. He has recovered—"

"The will?" interrupted Leon.

"He has found the packet which was taken from you. It contained a will then; it holds one now. I ought to congratulate Baldimore Bryce."

The detective's voice was full of keen sarcasm which Leon could not but observe.

As he ceased the secretary held up the gold ring.

"Hal where did you find that?" cried Gentleman Phil.

"When I saw it last it was on Irene Nims's finger!"

CHAPTER XVII.

THE SAND-BAG'S WORK.

WITH the proof before him that Irene Nims had not gone to Europe, but that she was still in New York, Gentleman Phil answered Leon with a laugh of satisfaction.

"She did not find anything in the secret niche, eh, Leon?" exclaimed the detective glancing at the bookcase.

"I removed its contents the night after Musgrave's death," was the reply.

"What did they consist of?"

"For the most part of diaries and memoranda nearly twenty years old."

"Where are they?"

The young secretary left the room a few mo-

ments, and when he returned he placed a packet in the spotter's hands.

Phil Fox drew a chair up to the table and began to go through the papers while Leon stole out and left him alone.

All the entries and other work was in Musgrave's handwriting, and the detective made two piles on the tables as he went over the mass.

When Leon returned with light steps so as not to disturb the indefatigable sleuth, Phil turned quickly and met him with a smile.

"I don't wonder that these papers were wanted," were the shadow's words. "Irene was sent to find them because she evidently knew where they were. I find here several secrets of the past. Here," laying his hand on one of the little piles, "here are proofs of Aida's right to nearly every dollar of Musgrave's estate; here is a complete refutation of the base charges against her mother—charges which drove her broken-hearted to her grave. No, Leon, I am not surprised that these documents are wanted. You did a fine thing when your thoughtfulness caused you to remove them after his death."

"Then Irene was sent for these papers, you say?" and Leon looked into the triumphant face of Phil Fox.

"Of course she was sent," was the quick answer. "Tully Trenck knows what he wants."

"That man again!" cried the secretary.

"Always that man, Leon. You will see his hand all through this maze of crime. You will see it again to-morrow."

"How to-morrow?"

"Wait and see. I believe you have an engagement with Baldimore Bryce at ten?"

"I have."

"Don't forget to keep it to the letter."

"I shall not."

"He may have another visitor at the same time. I don't say that he will have, mind you, but he may."

Leon gave the detective an inquisitive look, but did not speak.

After a while Phil Fox tied up the papers again and handed them to Leon, with an injunction to keep them safe until called for.

"There's another link," said the city ferret. "We are picking them up one by one, and by and by the chain will be complete."

"I wish we could get onto the hand that struck Sam and silenced him."

A faint smile appeared at the corners of the detective's mouth, and the reply Leon got did not encourage him.

"What shall we do with the ring?" asked the secretary.

The sleuth held out his hand.

"I'll take that," said he. "Irene won't advertise her lost property, so you will not be kept busy over the papers, Leon."

Leon dropped the ring into the detective's palm, and saw it carefully transferred to his pocket.

Half an hour later the door of the Musgrave residence opened to let Phil Fox out, and when he had heard his "good-night," Leon went back to the library.

As for the man of Broadway, he went downtown, but did not stop in at his office.

He kept on till he came to the building in which were the vaults of the Fidelity Trust Company.

There he plunged into a dark hallway and climbed three flights of steps.

The reader will recollect that he once sent Sam Sharpe to this very building, with instructions to drop a note into a certain room by means of a secret slide in a door.

At this very door the detective halted. Then he found a spring with his fingers, as if they had eyes that could see in the dark, and a slide opened before his face.

Taking something from his pocket, he dropped it through the opening into the room beyond, and was about to turn away when he heard a voice whisper:

"Sam?"

Detective Phil leaned toward the door, and answered:

"It is not Sam."

"Ah, the captain, then!" was the response.

"Are you busy?"

"Not for a few moments."

"I want no more."

"All right."

The last words were followed by the noise of a key in the lock, and as the door was opened the detective slipped into the room.

The bolt was slipped back to its place as the door shut, and Phil found himself face to face with a tall man with a hatchet face, cleanly shaven, and furnished with a pair of quick, weasel-like eyes.

He held in his hand the object which the detective had dropped through the slide. It was not large and his long fingers easily covered it.

"Were you here a while ago, captain?" asked the man whose room and its contents were revealed by the light of a gas jet which burned so near the wall that it had smoked it black.

"I have not been here for some days."

"Ho! then it might have been Sam."

"It was not Sam," answered the detective

with equal positiveness. "Did you hear some one at the door?"

"I did. I heard the footsteps come up the stairs, and then I detected fingers on the door as if they were feeling for the button."

"They did not find it, eh, Jason?"

"Find it? No! They weren't quite in the secret," and the thin man grinned.

"How long did your would-be visitor stay?"

"Not long. When he found that he could not find the button, I heard him hiss a curse of disappointment and go away. It did me good to have him foiled, though I would have given a good deal to have known who he was."

Gentleman Phil was silent for a moment.

"Jason," said he, "that man may come back again."

"On hunt of the button he could not find in the dark?"

"Yes."

"Shall I assist him when he comes?"

"No. Let him find it for himself if he can."

"Do you know him, captain?" but before the sleuth could speak in reply, even if he intended to, the old man went on:

"I'm going too far!" he exclaimed. "You keep your own secrets. I have no right to ask you whether you know anything about the man who was at my door to-night. I don't want to know. I will not let him in when he comes, because you don't want him here. Maybe he will drop some contribution into the room—"

"I think there is no danger of him doing that, Jason," returned the detective. "He was on a tour of investigation, that is all."

The old man looked more puzzled than ever, and the look did not vanish entirely until some time after the detective had taken his departure.

Then he went to the little table beneath the gas and opened the paper which the city Vidocq had dropped into the room.

He found thereon several lines of writing which he read carefully and then put the paper away under his coat.

"I'd like to know when they want my story," muttered he. "For forty years I've been Jason the janitor, and I expect I'm to be that to the day of my death. I've seen a good many things in my time. I've received lots of parcels and notes through the slide, but not one secret have I betrayed in all that time. I'm a trust company myself though not many people know it, and since I've been in this building I've had in my hands things as valuable as some kept in the big vaults below. I know Phil Fox like a book, and he is aware that I have secrets that would make some people wince if I chose to tell them."

Meanwhile the New York detective was some distance from the man he had just visited.

All at once he stopped and looked up at a light in the third story of a building.

"In the name of Fortune, what does that mean?" exclaimed the detective still staring at the light. "Can it be that Aida has left her employer already? This was not the bargain, but as I live there is a light in her room."

He started across the street as he spoke, and as he got midway between the two pavements the light went out and the window in which it had shone was dark like several near by.

The sleuth kept on across the street, but instead of entering the building he halted in the shadow of it as it fell across the sidewalk and waited.

Presently a figure emerged from the open hall and started off.

It was the figure of a woman.

Immediately Phil started in pursuit, but kept at a respectful distance in the rear.

"The female night-hawk is at work I see!" he ejaculated as he watched the gliding figure. "I wonder if she lost another ring up in Aida's room? Certainly Aida did not send her to the old quarters for anything. The girl is too shrewd to do anything of the kind. She put out of the way everything valuable before she entered into Riley Dwyer's service, so the searcher was not rewarded to-night."

On, on went the New York ferret and the almost noiseless figure that kept on ahead.

He did not relinquish the pursuit until he saw her vanish beyond the door of a house which she unlocked herself. He remained awhile to look at the building from eaves to foundation and then turned back.

"Deliver your report, Irene, and hear him curse his disappointment," laughed Phil. "The Scotia is plowing the waves to-night with a false Irene Nims on board. The big scheme could not spare you, woman. You have been too useful to the chief villain thus far. I would say that he has found you worth as much to him as the other tools he has enlisted in his cause."

The man ferret soon disappeared from the vicinity of the house to which he had tracked Irene Nims from Aida's abode.

He went down into that quarter of the city occupied by Mag Manacle and her satellites.

Was he going to enter the den in his usual garb to be recognized by half a dozen men whom he had helped to prison?

He walked past the trap and caught the sound of laughter and clinking glasses that came from the interior.

"One of these days, Mag, I will make you

talk, even if it ruins your business," thought Phil to himself.

The next moment he heard a quick cat-like tread behind him.

In a flash he turned and saw a figure dart upon him with a dark object like a sand-bag lifted in mid-air.

The detective threw up his hands at once, but the weapon came down with resistless force and without noise, and he went backward like a man with his skull crushed in.

All this was the work of an instant, and as Phil Fox fell against the building near at hand, he was in the grip of two masked men.

CHAPTER XVIII.

LEON'S THUNDERBOLT.

THE clocks in the vicinity of Broadway and Wall were indicating ten the next day when Leon Larimore, the young private secretary, entered the ten-by-twelve office occupied by Baltimore Bryce, Independent Detective, etc.

That individual was at home and evidently awaiting Leon's arrival, but he was not alone.

In an arm-chair near the office table, with a fragrant cigar between his teeth, and with a triumph of some kind snapping in his eyes, sat Tully Trenck, whom the secretary had not seen very often since the day of the funeral.

Mr. Trenck bowed condescendingly to Leon, who returned the favor with a sharp, suspicious look.

"You are on time to a dot, Mr. Larimore," remarked the detective. "Mr. Trenck and myself have not been here long. You are aware, perhaps, that he is the gentleman who kept me on the trail when there was every reason for giving it up."

Leon bowed, and replied that he believed he had heard of something of the kind.

"I will now submit my find to your inspection," continued Bryce, moving toward a safe which stood in one corner of the room. "I brought the package over from the Trust Company myself this morning. Mr. Trenck here, with yourself, can identify Musgrave's writing, so we will be safe on that score."

Leon glanced at Tully Trenck at that moment, and saw a sinister, smiling face through a cloud of light smoke.

A moment afterward the detective opened the safe, and took from it a packet, a glimpse of which made Leon start.

He would have recognized it fifty feet off, for there could be no other packet like it in all New York.

"This is the prize which the shrewd rascals wrested from you on the corner of Broadway and Pine," exclaimed the private sleuth, holding the package up to Leon's gaze as he came toward the table. "Ah! I see you recognize the outside, at any rate!"

He drew his chair forward and deposited the large envelope in front of Leon.

"You see the villains disturbed the seals, as a matter of course," he went on, glancing from Leon to Tully Trenck. "They expected to find money instead of what appears to be the last will and testament of some one."

He took the envelope up as he finished, and began to relieve it of its contents.

Leon looked on with his curiosity at the highest pitch.

"They did not cut the tape that surrounds the legal-looking document," he showed the will to Leon as he proceeded. "They could tell by outside inspection that there was no money here for them. Common snatch-thieves don't want to be incumbered with dead people's wills. They want the ready cash; eh, Mr. Trenck?"

"Generally," answered that individual, between whiffs. "At least, that is my understanding of such matters."

"I would like to have you make sure that I have found the right document," the detective had turned to Leon again. "This tape, I find, can be untied, and as neatly restored to its proper condition. Shall I, gentlemen?"

"I see no wrong-doing in it," answered Trenck, his curiosity seeming to rise a little.

"As a matter of course I have the best interests of my old friend's estate at heart. I have employed Mr. Bryce, as an experienced detective—one of the very best in New York," he seemed to take inward pleasure in saying this, "to exert himself to the utmost. I wish I could say that he has captured the rascals as well as their spoil; but he has done very well under the circumstances. I congratulate him."

Baltimore Bryce inclined his head in recognition of the praise, and looked across the table at Leon.

The young secretary was much excited, though he tried to remain calm.

He was anxious to look beyond the tape that incircled the somewhat ponderous looking paper in the detective's hands.

He wanted to see if his name was still there as witness to Monckton Musgrave's signature on the will which gave away a million.

"I have come here for the purpose of identifying the stolen property," he said, in reply to Bryce's look. "The other papers taken from the envelope certainly are the ones I saw Mr. Musgrave place in it just before he intrusted it

to my charge. As to the will, I can only witness my own signature and his, for that is all I saw of the document."

"That will be enough," said Tully Trenck. "Every bequest made by my old friend shall be carried out to the letter. I was his companion in life. I will be his friend in death."

"Then I think you ought to be the person to open the paper for identification," and the detective handed the document to Trenck, who seemed to take it with a good deal of reluctance.

Leon watched Tully Trenck as his deft fingers opened the knot of tape.

"I would know Musgrave's handwriting in the dark almost," exclaimed Trenck, when the operation was accomplished. "Is this his signature, Mr. Larimore, and this yours, too, by the way?"

The young private secretary leaned forward to meet the paper which Tully Trenck held toward him.

He looked searchingly at the two signatures a full minute, while silence of the deepest kind filled the office.

He saw the last bold signature of the man who had been his last friend; he noticed the peculiar shape of the M's, and the flourish which he invariably made beneath his name.

And then his own name, with the letters straight up and down like soldiers at inspection—a signature which he had been informed by experts would be very hard to counterfeit.

The young man was amazed, but at the same time a thrill of pleasure ran through his frame.

The will had been found intact, and there was a startling surprise in store for Tully Trenck, the cool-headed rascal, and expected legatee.

Having studied the signatures from every standpoint, Leon looked up and caught Trenck's eye.

He thought he saw in its depth a triumph which he could not fathom.

What was Tully Trenck rejoicing over if the will he held in his hand gave the great sum to Aida Armstrong, and not to him as the friend of Musgrave?

"It looks correct," Leon said at length.

"I am glad to hear that," put in the detective. "It lifts a load from my mind, and makes me feel conscious of having done my duty. You fully identify the signature, I believe?"

"I think I can say that I do," and Leon's eyes wandered back to the two names and studied them again.

"Mrs. Nims's name is beneath yours," remarked Tully Trenck.

Leon started slightly at mention of the name.

"That is the name of the housekeeper," he replied, and then his mind went back to the ring he found in the secret niche behind the books but the night before.

Yes, that was Irene's autograph signed by herself. He would have sworn to that.

"This settles it," smiled Tully Trenck, turning to the detective. "I am satisfied that you have recovered the last will and testament of Monckton Musgrave. I—What is this? My name in the body of the paper here? You will pardon me, Mr. Larimore. I could not help noticing it. Great God! what did I ever do to receive such treatment at my friend's hands?"

A smile stole to Leon Larimore's lips. He could not keep it back.

"He has discovered that instead of the million he gets a thousand, perhaps," thought the young man. "This is a drop that cuts Tully Trenck down without warning."

Already the face of the man who held the recovered document was undergoing another change. Higher than before the light of victory was leaping up in his eyes.

What did it mean?

"Gentlemen, I would have valued Musgrave's friendship more than I have done if I had known this!" he cried. "He has made me his heir—me!—the man who was away from him while he wrestled with disease. Look for yourself, Mr. Larimore."

Leon's gaze had become a stare, and the words rung in his ears like a knell of his hopes.

He felt that his face was pale, and he saw that the countenance of Tully Trenck had become that of a triumphant devil's.

"Where? let me see!" almost shouted Leon, bounding up and then leaning over the table. "You Monckton Musgrave's heir?"

"It looks that way, young man," was the answer, and the eyes of the speaker seemed to transfix him like darts. "It is right here, in the bold hand of a man who had a heart for an old friend after all."

The breathless secretary looked over the finger that pointed at a certain lengthy paragraph on the page before him, and then he read:

"I bequeath to my old friend, Tully Trenck, Esq., without reservation, my moneys, bonds, credits, real estate, in short, all my property within the boundaries of the City of New York—"

Leon read no further.

A singular feeling of uneasiness took possession of him.

What! the whole thing Tully Trenck's, and Aida left out in the cold again?

He had never received such a blow in all his life!

Yet there it was in black and white before his eyes, and the proud finger of the man with the Satanic grin was on the spot!

"I think we will not go through this document unless Mr. Larimore wishes to look for his own name," coolly said Trenck to the detective as Leon fell back, white as a cloth and with his eyes fastened upon him.

"You will carry it back to the vaults of the Trust Company for the present. Did I understand you to say that you approve of my suggestion, Leon?"

Leon had not said a word, but called from his abstraction by the man's voice he started up.

"The vaults are the best depository it can have now," said he. "It is safe there at any rate. God knows, sir, where that paper has been within this past few days!"

He looked straight at Tully Trenck while he muttered the last words, and the rascal colored.

"That is true!" he suddenly laughed. "As I said awhile ago, Mr. Bryce here deserves unstinted praise for his cunning. I am sure his feat will go on record as a neat job—one of the best in detective annals. There is your charge, Mr. Bryce," and the will fell at the detective's hand and was quickly picked up.

That was all.

Leon had no desire to remain another moment in the place.

The air seemed suffocating; his brain appeared on fire.

He was never able to tell how he got out of the detective's office—whether he rushed away like a madman, or whether he bowed himself out with the devilish leer of Tully Trenck for a parting on the other side.

At any rate, he found himself on the street below jostled by the hurrying lines of humanity.

"My God! this villainy tops the pyramid. Where is Phil Fox the spotter?" he cried as he rushed away.

CHAPTER XX.

LEON ON THE TRAIL.

WITH surging brain and wildly-beating heart Leon made his way to the gentleman detective's office.

Phil Fox had said to him on parting the night before:

"Come to my office directly after the business at Baltimore Bryce's quarters. I think you will find me there."

Leon knew the genteel sleuth to be punctual with his engagements, and he fully expected to find him in his office when he reached the door. But he was disappointed.

The room was not locked, he went in.

The spotter of the metropolis was not there.

"He may come presently," exclaimed the young man. "By waiting here I can cool off and get my thoughts together. Can it be that we have been deceived all along—that Musgrave did leave all his wealth to that man Tully Trenck? No! I won't believe any such stuff; but how can we refute it? Ah! we must do so. With the aid of the detective who, as Ralph Ringgold was often in Musgrave's house awhile before he died, I will unearth this foul conspiracy against a young girl. Why does he not come? I am burning to tell him of the piece of infamy I have just witnessed."

Leon waited an hour but the man he wanted to see did not enter the room.

He grew more and more impatient, and at last, unable to curb his eagerness longer, he went away.

If he had known where to look for the Broadway ferret he would not have gone home as he did.

"The gentleman, Mr. Musgrave's old friend, was here awhile ago," said the housekeeper to Leon when they met.

The young secretary started.

"Does he want possession already?" thought Leon, as his eyes got a gleam of indignation, and then he said to the woman:

"What did he want, Mary?"

"He wanted to do a little writing in the library. He said he happened to be in this part of the city, and thought he would drop in to write a moment on his old friend's desk."

"How long was he there?"

"About twenty minutes."

Leon went direct to the library.

A glance at the books told him that they had been tampered with again.

"He could not believe Irene, and so he came for a look for himself," smiled the young man.

"I know now that the papers that used to repose in the secret niche are of great value to Tully Trenck. Well, let him get them if he can!" and with a triumphant laugh Leon went off.

Three times during the day he went to the detective's office, but always with the same result.

At last he began to inquire for the man of people who had offices in the same building, but none remembered having seen him since the day before.

The disappearance began to be a mystery, and at last Leon became alarmed.

He proceeded to Mulberry street and made

inquiries among the police, but nothing satisfactory rewarded him.

Phil Fox was on a great trail, and may have disappeared for a purpose. Detectives did this sometimes, as Leon knew; but this thought did not relieve him.

He could not get around the ferret's promise to be at the office after his interview with Baldimore Bryce, the private sleuth.

There is where Leon stuck every time.

"Once more," cried the vexed young man, as the shades of evening fell around the city. "I will go back to the office again. If I don't find him there, or obtain some trace of him, I will believe that the enemy has sprung a trap on Phil Fox."

Leon went back to the Broadway office with a heavy heart.

"Just as I expected!" he said to himself as he touched the knob at the head of the steps. "The door is locked— No! by Jove! I can get in at last!"

To his surprise the door opened as he spoke, and he found himself looking into the detective's office, which had for its tenants shadows and silence.

He might as well have found the door locked, for the city ferret was not in, and Leon stood a few moments in the dusk, undetermined and nonplused.

Suddenly he heard a footstep in the hall beyond the door.

It stopped near the step.

Leon went forward.

"Ob, it is you, is it?" exclaimed a voice, and then the young man looked down upon a dwarfed specimen of humanity such as one sees every day in every great city.

"Yes, who are you?" answered Leon.

"I am Tippy," was the reply. "I do chores about this building for the gentlemen who have offices in it. When I heard you in the room, I thought the detective had come back. Want to see him, sir?"

"Indeed I do."

"Well he hasn't been here since yesterday, that I've seen."

"But his room was open when I came."

"Then the man who went out awhile ago must have left it so."

"What man?"

"I don't know, sir."

Leon took a quick step toward the dwarf.

"Are you certain a man was in this room awhile ago?" he asked, eagerly.

"Wot's my eyes for?" cried the other. "I know a man when I see one, I guess."

"Of course you do, but are you sure the person whom you saw leave the room was not the detective himself?"

Tippy the chore-dwarf laughed derisively.

"Don't I know Phil Fox?" cried he. "I tell you the man wasn't the detective any more than I'm Apollo or some other god. Do I look like Apollo, mister?" And the dwarf struck an attitude that made Leon smile in spite of himself.

"When was the man here?" he asked.

"Inside of an hour."

"Alone?"

"Alone."

"Did you see his face?"

"Not much of it. I saw that he was well-built, and had a quick step—that's about all the photograph I took o' him."

"How long was he in the office?"

"I don't know. I heard him there several times, but I thought it was Captain Phil, you see, and didn't take much notice of it. When I saw him go away I knew he wasn't the private cop, but I kinder thought he had been sent to the office for something by the sleuth. You don't seem to think he was, I see."

Leon said nothing to confirm the dwarf's guess, for he had fallen into a deep study over the mysterious visit.

He went back into the office and made a thorough examination of it.

"The man who was seen to go away unlocked the door to get in," thought he. "Would he have done this if he had reasons for believing that Detective Phil would come back while he was here? What did the man do whom Sam found in this very office when he came back, according to the detective's theory? Was the stranger after another ambush? I can find no traces of his visit, yet he came hither for a purpose, and a dark one at that."

The private secretary locked the door by means of the catch-lock on the inside when he went out, and once more he found himself on the street where the night had fallen for the gas-lamps had been lighted.

"I'm going to turn hunter myself for a spell," he muttered. "There is something about this disappearance and the strange visit that fills me with forebodings of evil. When I couple them with the thunderbolt that fell in Baldimore Bryce's office to-day, I can see that the conspiracy is still at work. My oath must be fulfilled if I am the only person left to fight the gang. I am going to stick to the trail that justice and vengeance get their own."

Not long afterward Leon appeared among the second-hand clothing-stores of Baxter street. Selecting one he entered and struck a

bargain for a suit, and put it on in the shop-keeper's private-room.

The metamorphosis was somewhat startling, and when Leon was on the street again he did not in the least resemble his old self.

Half an hour after this transaction the young man crossed the step of Mag Manacle's front door.

It was his first visit to the place though its location and reputation were well known to him.

He knew a good deal about the private room where more plots were hatched than in any other room in New York though he had never seen it for Phil Fox had told him much concerning Mag's famous establishment.

Leon tried to assume a free and easy air when he entered the large room well supplied with tables. He had his eyes about him and used them with effect from the moment he crossed the threshold.

He had barely entered the place ere he was spied by the Amazon herself, and in a moment she stood at his table waiting for his order.

Leon delivered it in an off-hand way and Mag departed to fill it.

At the table behind him sat two men.

He had seen them as he entered the room, but had not given them particular attention.

It would not do for him to turn his head for the purpose of taking a minute observation, but he leaned back in his chair thus getting as near them as possible and drummed slightly on the table while he waited for Mag's return.

"I reckon he thinks the way's clear now, eh?" laughed a voice at Leon's back.

"He ought to," was the reply. "It wasn't such a trick after all."

"Not much of one. You know we needn't die in the almshouse."

"Nor in prison. By Jove! no. We've got our hands on a key that'll turn whenever we touch it. It's better than drifting round picking up an odd job here and one there."

"And gettin' run in in the bargain? Of course it is!"

Then both men laughed while a nameless thrill passed over Leon's frame.

At this juncture Mag Manacle appeared with his cigars, and as she placed them before him she observed:

"You must come again. I've got a room I let out to people who want to enjoy a quiet, thoughtful hour. I'll let you see it before you go away."

Leon wondered how the woman knew that the present was his first visit to the place, and as he was anxious to hear more of the conversation back of him, he told Mag that he would be delighted to inspect the room as the quickest way of getting shut of her.

When he turned his attention again to the other table he discovered that it was empty, but a few steps away a man was eyeing him after the manner of a hawk.

"That is one of the men," thought the young man. "Were I to name him I would call him Kit Kline."

As Leon looked the man turned and passed from the room.

Of course the private secretary could not follow him, therefore he did not see him appear suddenly to Mag Manacle as she was in the act of taking several bottles of wine from her cupboard, and clutch her wrist.

"Who is that young chap in yonder?" cried the man as their eyes met.

"I don't know."

"Don't fool me, Mag," was the growling retort.

"I don't know, I say!" and the Amazon broke loose and stood erect, her eyes in a blaze of rage. "You forget that I don't betray my customers—the new ones especially. Besides, Kit Kline, you can't afford to browbeat Mag Manacle!"

The man scowled and ground his teeth.

CHAPTER XXI.

A FRIEND IN NEED.

LEON at the table in the other room knew nothing of this.

He had seen that he had been watched for a spell by the man who had followed Mag from the apartment, and his guess at the fellow's identity was the correct one.

Kit Kline was a total stranger to him by sight, but from the detective's portrait which had been drawn in vivid colors he believed he had spotted the convict.

The other man who had been Kit's companion at the table had disappeared altogether.

Leon did not know whither he had gone.

"If one was Kit Kline the other was Black Barry a fit companion for the desperate villain of half a dozen prisons," thought Leon, summing up his conclusions at the little table. "I don't want to be recognized by either of them here to-night. I did not come to Mag's for that purpose. The one who looked at me so hard a few moments ago evidently thought he knew me. I must not let him get another look."

Leon drew his hat a little more over his eyes and pushed back his chair.

As he was rising he happened to glance toward the door through which Mag always carried her viands, and caught sight of the Amazon herself looking at him.

In a moment she beckoned to him, and Leon passed from the room to feel her hand on his arm the moment he had crossed the step.

"Come with me, young man," said Mag glancing down upon him. "Ask no questions and get no lies."

Thus adjured, Leon kept mute and was conducted to the woman's tap-room where she turned upon him and gave him a singular look.

"I wish you hadn't come here to-night," said she. "I don't care to say whether I know you or not, but I would rather you had staid away."

"Why so? I thought you wanted trade," answered Leon for want of something better to say.

"So I do. So I do," smiled the giantess. "That's what I'm here for. Money! money! money! All the same, though, I would rather not have your custom to-night. You're watched, young man. There! I guess you know now."

"Watched am I?" laughed Leon though the revelation made him start. "I think I know by whom, Mag."

"Well, no difference. I don't betray anybody, you see—not unless they get smart on my hands, which is something I won't stand from certain people. As I was saying just now, you're watched, and you want to get out of here."

"Where are they?"

"Never mind that, either."

"Do they know?"

"I don't know what they know. It isn't my business to find out. The main thing I know is that it isn't healthy for you to be in this vicinity at this time."

"I thank you, Mag," said Leon. "I know the two men who have spotted me from some cause or other."

"You need not tell me if you do," was the response. "I am wanted by my customers in the big room," and the hand of the Amazonian Venus fell softly upon Leon's shoulder.

"One word—you will listen to it, I know," cried the young man, hesitating in his tracks.

Mag looked at him but did not speak, and he took her silence for license to go on.

"Do you know anything about Philip Fox, the Broadway detective?" asked the secretary.

He thought he saw Mag recoil slightly, but it may have been mere fancy.

"I don't keep an information bureau, young man," Mag replied.

"But he has been here in the line of duty."

"So have other people," she said.

"Was he here last night, or since?"

"Don't you hear my children calling for refreshments? You must go now. I will put you out myself. I want to take care of my customers. I like you maybe—that is, I don't want to see you watched by people who show their teeth when they can't have their own way. Come with me."

The grip seemed to tighten on Leon's arm, and he was led across the room to a door which Mag opened by touching a spring in the wall.

The young secretary saw dimly revealed at his feet a flight of steps.

"Go to the bottom and don't be afraid," said the voice of Mag Manacle at his elbow. "When you get there you will find another door with your hands. Open it and keep on. One of these days you may thank Mag Manacle for her doings to-night, but I don't think of that now. Go. My customers are becoming boisterous."

Hardly knowing what he was doing, Leon Larimore went down the steps and when he heard the door shut behind him he was in Egyptian darkness.

The passage was narrow and the stairway dangerously steep, but he groped his way down and at last stood on solid footing he did not know how far from the top.

Obedying Mag's injunction he felt about till he found a latch which he pressed, and the next second he could put his hand forward into Stygian space.

"I am going to believe that Mag Manacle warned me in good faith," he thought to himself. "The man who watched me must have showed his teeth to her in a manner she did not like; maybe he did not pay for what he got to-night, and high words came of it. But he was Kit Kline, alias Diamond Dunn, and his companion was Black Barry, which tells me that I can't afford to have them drop on my track just yet."

Leon went forward into a passage so narrow that he thought he would stick sometimes, and with a ceiling so low that he had to stoop.

He believed he was underground, but where he was he did not know.

For some time the secretary threaded the rayless passage, and when his hand told him that he had found the end, he stopped and felt for another latch.

In doing this he made some noise, and all at once he heard a tapping overhead.

"Who is there?" came a faint voice from above.

Leon did not know what to say.

"Are you from Mag's?" the same voice continued.

"Yes," ventured the young man; and then held his breath.

"All right," was the response.

And then a trap-door opened, and Leon saw a light.

"Come up. Grasp the edge of the opening and lift yourself."

Leon did so, and when he had drawn his body up out of the darkness, he looked into the face of a young girl who was staring at him with an expression of curiosity on her face.

"You don't want to ask me any questions," cried the girl, seeing that Leon was about to address her. "I am not permitted to converse with anybody who comes from Mag's through the tunnel. I knew you were coming long before you got here, and I was ready to open to you when you came up."

"Do you watch the tunnel all the time?" asked Leon; but the girl instantly elevated a finger, and smiled:

"No questions, I tell you. Come; I will show you the way out. The coast is clear here, or Mag would not have sent you this way."

The girl, who could not have been past sixteen, though it was hard to tell her age by her face, took Leon's sleeve between thumb and finger and started off.

He was led through the room into which he had emerged from the tunnel, and thence into another which had no light.

At last he heard the click of a key in a lock, and in a moment he felt the night-air on his face.

"Go, and good-night," said the girl dropping her hand as she spoke. "I work for Mag, and I guess that's enough for you to know."

Leon was not given time to return thanks for he was pushed across the threshold, and the door was shut in his face.

"In fortune's name, what is to be the end of this adventure?" he exclaimed as he paused foolishly just beyond the door like a person still in the thrall of some bewilderment. "I never dreamed there was such a place as this in New York. Has all this been done to throw me off the scent—to keep me from finding out what has become of Phil Fox the detective? Mag Manacle appeared honest enough. Her refusal to explain rather puzzles me, but I can't go back. If I were to retrace my steps I would have Kit Kline and Black Barry on my heels again, and I don't want that."

Leon started off with this reflection.

He had been let out into an alley which was almost as dark as the tunnel he had threaded from Mag Manacle's. He was nearly midway between two streets and selecting one, half at a venture, he walked off with his adventure turning constantly in his mind.

The young secretary breathed freer when he reached the sidewalk and found no vigilant eyes watching him. He felt that he had passed through some great danger, and for the first time he gave Mag Manacle all the praise that belonged to her.

He was glad now that he had groped his way through the secret passage, for he was in a condition to go back to the detective.

There was one time during his journey in the dark when he had almost decided to turn back, to mount the steps and refuse to accept of Mag Manacle's friendship.

If he had done so he might have seen the man who had watched him so closely steal again into Mag's tap-room when he was not looking and heard him hiss through set teeth:

"So you gave me away to the young rat and sent him off with a bug in his ear, eh?"

If ever a woman looked into the face of a devil that woman was Mag Manacle as she turned upon the man who looked at her with the short space of ten feet between them.

"Never mind what I told him, Kit Kline," cried the Amazon, as she coolly placed on the table the bottle in her hand. "Behind you is the door which leads to the street."

He did not move, but, on the contrary, seemed to plant himself firmly on the floor.

"You've got a past, woman," he grinned.

"And you—you have a past and a future?" was the flashing answer, and before the man could throw up a hand, the speaker cleared the space between them.

In an instant her tremendous hands landed on his breast, and he was lifted almost clear of the floor without any apparent effort on her part.

"Keep clear of me after this, or you will feel something at your throat deadlier than the hands of Mag Manacle!" she cried, and while looks of fire followed the threat, the door was kicked open, and Kit Kline went through it like a thunderbolt!

CHAPTER XXII.

BETWEEN TWO FIRES.

"GREAT Jericho! thrown from a catapult, or shot from an air-gun—which?" cried the man, who picked himself up some distance from where Mag Manacle stood, her eyes blazing like two circles of fire. "She doesn't want me about any more just because I reminded her that she has a past. She let the young chap out by some means or other, and seems determined

to stand by him. Well, if she thinks she can afford to play cross with me, all right. I'll show her, before the game's out, that she's lost more than she gained by this play."

Of course the man who spoke thus in ill-humor was Kit Kline, and he was on the street when he finished.

"Hello! what did she do?" observed a man who came up at that moment.

"Do?" sent Kit, through his teeth. "She picked me up and shot me through the door."

The questioner looked his friend over from head to foot.

"Can she do that with you?" he exclaimed.

"I should say so," grinned Kit. "I've had an experience with that giantess before this. She can throw Barnum's giant across the street. If you think she isn't a woman of iron, go back and tell 'er that she's got a past that isn't altogether rosy."

The man whom Kit addressed shrugged his shoulders.

"Not to-night," he remarked. "Your experience will do for me. Did she forbid you the trap?"

"Yes."

"Well, it won't be healthy for you to go back. Mag Manacle never revokes an order."

"I sha'n't ask her to revoke that one; but before long she will wish she had never issued it. Come, Barry, the kid got away through her assistance. We will set a trap for him where that infernal Amazon doesn't hold the trigger down for the game to get away."

The two men walked off together, their figures vanishing side by side where the lights of New York seemed to get fewer.

Mag Manacle went back to her customers.

There remained on her face no traces of the episode in the private tap-room, but now and then she was seen to smile to herself as if she thought of the figure cut by the convict as he left her house hurried from her hands in an outburst of temper.

"Yes, I've got a past, but because I have I don't have to be taunted with it," exclaimed Mag in the little room when she found a little time on her hands. "I told him to keep his distance, and he ought to know what that means. I got the lamb away from the wolves to-night. It was more than I could stand—to see them watching him with a dark game of some kind in their heads."

"He came to my house for the first time, and he wondered no doubt how I knew it. Well, I know a good many things I don't get credit for knowing and that is one of them. He wanted to know if I knew anything about Phil Fox the spotter. Why didn't he ask Kit Kline, ha, ha! Maybe he wouldn't have got an answer if he had. I guess not. Leo took care of the young man, and he is on the street long ago wiser than when he was when he came to my house."

Mag helped herself to some wine which she poured from a bottle that had been brought up from the drinking room.

"A past? Certainly I have a past," she observed again addressing herself. "We've all got that more or less. What if I have been where many of my sex never go? He had no right to throw it up to me with the record he has himself. The next time—by Heaven! the next time, I'll do worse. I've got away from that old experience as far as I can. I don't intend to go back to it unless I have to for throttling the man I throttled once in a prison yard. Let him keep his distance! That's all I ask."

Mag Manacle emptied the bottle and she responded to a call from the big room and went down to serve her customers.

She muttered the name of Leon as she went down-stairs, showing that she knew and that her thoughts were of the young man she had secured from the clutches of the villains.

Meantime Kit Kline and his comrade had left Mag's some distance behind them, and after awhile they entered a house the door of which Kit locked as he shut it.

"I'll just lock the door till she gives the signal," remarked Kit.

"Do you think she will come?"

"Of course."

"Without his knowledge?"

"Yes."

"By Jove! there she is now. A little more and she would have caught us on the street."

As several peculiar knocks sounded at the door the convict turned back and opened it.

A female figure glided into the house.

"Is that you, Irene?" asked the convict.

"It is I, but hush! don't mention my name in such tones. You know that this visit is a secret one."

"Of course," was the laughing response. "Here is the door. Light up, Barry. She is here."

The flash of a match followed the opening of a door, and the two men looked into the face of Irene Nims as she pulled a veil from her face.

"He does not know that you are here?" asked Kit anxiously.

"No," answered the woman. "I received your mysteriously sent message this afternoon and I am here."

The two men exchanged glances and Kit's hand was seen to drop into his waistcoat-pocket.

"Irene," observed he with a grin, "what will you give for something you have lost?"

Irene Nims started.

"I have lost nothing," she smiled.

"Hol are you certain of that?"

"I am. I have nothing worth losing, therefore I have no reward to offer."

Kit removed his hand and held up between finger and thumb something wrapped in light tissue paper.

Irene bent forward eagerly as the convict leaned over the table and began to open the packet.

"Don't be too sure that you have lost nothing, my dear," smiled he glancing up into the woman's face. "You must be very absent-minded not to have missed this."

As he finished he displayed in his palm a gold ring at sight of which the woman fell back with a startling cry.

"My ring!" she exclaimed glancing at her left hand which seemed to confirm her exclamation.

"In Heaven's name, where did you find it?"

"It is yours, then?" remarked Kit. "I thought you hadn't lost anything."

"But I did not think of that because I had not missed it," returned Irene. "It is my ring. Now tell me where I lost it."

"That would be hard to tell," replied the convict. "I'm certain, however, that you lost it somewhere while abroad."

"Did you find it?"

"Why do you ask that question when I am the person who restores your property?"

"Did you pick it up on the street?"

"No."

Mrs. Nims looked again at the ring and seemed lost in reflection.

"My advice to you, Irene, would be to keep the ring at home if it is liable to slip from your finger," continued Kit. "You lost it this time where you compromised yourself."

"I?" cried Irene falling back again.

"Yes. We are not the first finders of your ring."

"Who found it, then?"

"Guess."

The woman reflected a moment and then shook her head.

"My mind has been thrown into a whirl by this occurrence. I can't think a moment with any effect. Tell me who found my ring and where."

"I can't say where it was found, I tell you. The human sleuth-hound with the keen scent picked it up."

Despite her evident resolution to remain quiet, a quick exclamation broke over Irene's lips.

She looked at the two men with not a vestige of natural color left on her face.

"Did he—Phil Fox—find—my—ring?" she exclaimed in gasps.

"That's the man."

Kit Kline seemed to enjoy the torture his revelations had inflicted.

"Then, how did it fall into your hands?"

"Never mind," both men laughed at once. "You ought not object now that you hold your treasure again."

"I do not, but—"

"But you would rather some other man had found it, eh, Irene?"

"Yes, yes!"

"That is natural. Under the circumstances," and the notorious convict lowered his voice as he looked the women in the eye, "I say under the circumstances, and you will understand me, Irene, you can't afford to have a man like the bloodhound of Gotham picking up rings that belong to you."

There was no answer.

Irene Nims sat spellbound and, for the moment, speechless in her chair.

Black Barry's hand under the table pinched Kit Kline's leg.

"Look here, woman, since we've gone and done you a favor, we want one in return," resumed the man of six prisons. "You know a good deal about the business we've had in hand the past few days."

Irene looked, but said nothing.

"Because you hold the ring the danger has not been averted."

"Don't tell me that!" cried the woman at last, as if the convict had forced the words from her.

"It is hard, cold truth," mercilessly answered Kit. "You ought to know that they have prisons for women as well as for men."

"My God! what are you driving at? I know all this, but I don't intend to run blindly into the traps set by the Broadway detective. I will prove too shrewd for that man. The ring is back again, and he can make it prove nothing; don't you see?" and Irene's colorless face got a smile of triumph that did not improve it.

"Don't build too high, Irene!" cried Kit. "We'd like to see you outwit a man like Phil Fox, without assistance. It can't be done."

"But you are my friends, are you not?"

"Of course we are."

"Then I will have help if I need any."

"Certainly, but as I said awhile ago, having done you a great favor, we want one in return."

Irene looked at the two men.

"There is but one way by which you can escape the clutches of this trail-dog of Gotham who struck the scent the day Monckton Musgrave died," Kit went on. "You don't want to hear the hellish grinding of the doors of Sing Sing, nor the drop of the trap that settles all. There is an avenue of escape from these things, I say."

Irene seemed ready to sink to the floor.

"Name it!" she gasped.

"You must become the wife of Diamond Dunn."

For a moment silence filled the room, then the woman found her tongue:

"Diamond Dunn? Who is he?" she asked.

Kit Kline broke out into a laugh that distorted his face.

"I have the honor to be that gentleman," he observed.

"You?" and Irene Nims started up as if driven to her feet by an electric shock. "Must I become your wife to save me from the law? Why, I am told that you—"

She stopped of her own accord, and looked down into the faces before her with horror and disgust on her own.

"No doubt you have been told a good deal," smiled Kit. "I'm not here to deny anything you may have heard concerning me. I have business of another nature on hand. I want a wife, Irene, and you are the chosen one. Don't say you will not accept Diamond Dunn, for he knows too much. The ceremony can be performed within an hour, and then you can go back to Tully Trenck, for the present. Refuse me—say 'no' if you dare—and your life will go out suddenly—like that!" and the convict snapped his fingers in the face of the spell-bound woman.

For a second there was no reply, and then Irene staggered across the room with a cry, to be caught by Kit ere she touched the floor.

CHAPTER XXIII.

THE CONVICT WINS.

IRENE'S fortitude deserted her probably when she needed it most.

The suddenness of the demand upon her, and the cool threat of the villain who made it, was enough to send her reeling toward the wall with consciousness taking flight.

"It was a hard blow, Kit," laughed Black Barry, when he saw Irene insensible, or nearly so, in his comrade's arms.

"I thought she would wince, but never mind—the trap will hold the game," was the response. "We can't afford to play a child's hand for the stakes we are after."

In a short time Mrs. Nims was recovered, and found herself in the chair from which she had started with her exclamation of terror.

"You're all right, now," smiled Kit Kline, leaning toward her. "I'm sorry the proposition struck you as hard as it did. I thought you had more nerve than that, you see."

"Surely you did not mean it?" observed Irene, taking some hope from the man's manner.

"I never speak in riddles, Irene," was the answer. "But let us not keep to that subject all the time. We'll consider the matter settled."

"Settled?" gaspingly echoed Mrs. Nims.

"Why, of course. There! don't repeat your act of awhile ago," and the convict touched Irene with a hand which had probably taken human life in its time. "Barry here is a witness to the bargain. You ought to know Barry. He's a good one."

Irene shivered. If Black Barry was a "good one," there were surely no demons in the world.

"What has become of Penwork?" asked Kit, continuing.

"Penwork?" cried Irene, with a start.

"Don't profess ignorance," laughed Kit. "I mean the man who came to New York via the Hudson River Road the night before you left Monckton Musgrave's house. Where is that man, Irene?"

The woman shook her head.

"Don't know, eh?" the rogue went on, with a sly glance at his companion. "You know that man. He came in the garb of a countryman, and looked for all the world like a greenhorn from Jersey. But he is one of the cleverest rascals in the country, and if there is anything in writing he can't imitate to perfection, I'd like to see it."

Mrs. Nims said nothing.

"Penwork did his work well, I should think," Kit proceeded, all the time watching Irene like a cat. "The man who sent for him knew just what he could do."

"I don't know," remarked Irene.

"You don't know, eh?" and Kit chuckled as he threw another look toward Barry. "Irene, my dear, you know just what Penwork accomplished. You know that Tully Trenck sent for him to forge a certain instrument which is expected to fetch the aforesaid Trenck about one million dollars in money and property. You know that while Penwork was in Tully Trenck's employ he was cooped up in a certain house in this city. He is not there now, because the work is done, and the forged paper is about to be launched before the public. I say you know all this, Irene, and as the soon-to-be bride of Dia-

mond Dunn, you ought to have no secrets detrimental to your husband."

Again Irene's cheek, which had recovered a little color, grew deadly pale.

"Don't lose color for nothing," grinned Kit.

"Come down to the truth. Where is Penwork, alias Dick Dakin?"

Irene shook her head.

"Very well," and the villain seemed to send the words through his teeth. "If you won't tell where he is, maybe you will agree to show us the original document whose chirography Penwork copied, if he did change the wording materially."

"In Heaven's name, do you want me to turn traitress?" cried Irene, with a start. "You must think I have a very elastic conscience—"

"You have, my dear—a very elastic one," interrupted Kit, bursting into a laugh which was the personification of studied cruelty. "I've known Irene Nims long before she got the name by marriage. I knew her in a city that is not New York. She wasn't Irene Nims then. I also knew her when she came one day—one rainy morning, to—"

"Hush!" almost shrieked the woman. "You have no more mercy than Satan."

"Haven't I, Irene? As I was saying, that rainy morning in November—"

"I won't listen!" and Mrs. Nims sprang up and clapped her hands over her ears.

"Just as you like," returned Kit Kline, which words Irene heard distinctly. "We won't pursue that train. Sit down, woman."

Irene did not obey, but looked toward the door at which the convict laughed.

"When you go out we'll wish you good-night," said he. "Irene, we want your answer. Will you tell us what became of the document whose writing Penwork copied while he was shut up in the certain house?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know, eh?" replied Kit Kline slowly. "If pressed, you would say, probably, that Tully Trenck gave it to the flames. He may have done it; nothing would be more natural under the circumstances. Penwork went back to his old haunts well paid for his work, eh?"

No answer.

The next minute Kit left his chair and came round the table with his eyes fastened on Irene.

"Woman, we want assistance and silence," he observed, and before Irene could escape even if she wished to fly, her wrist was encircled by fingers that had the grip of a manacle. "You will tell the truth now, or the last acts of yours will be spread before the human bloodhounds that fatten on the crimes of mankind. This is no child's game. You will become Mrs. Dunn before you quit this house, and then you dare not betray your husband, nor keep any secrets from him."

Black Barry left the room as Kit finished and Irene heard him leave the house by the front door.

She was alone with Kit Kline; the man of six prisons.

"Now go on," resumed the convict leading Mrs. Nims back to her chair. "Penwork is gone?"

"Yes."

"When did he leave?"

"The second day after he came."

"In the old disguise?"

"Yes."

"What became of the original document?"

Irene hesitated.

"It was not destroyed?" persisted Kit.

"It was not."

"Is it where you can find it, Irene?"

"It is."

A smile of triumph appeared at the corners of the convict's mouth.

Perhaps Irene thought that by answering his questions she would get out of the trap unscathed.

"Irene, I want that document," continued Kit.

"You?"

"I want it, I say."

"What do you want of it?"

"That belongs to me," smiled Kit. "It is a wonder that Tully Trenck did not destroy it."

"He thinks it is destroyed," replied Irene.

"Ho! so much the better!" exclaimed the convict. "What did you want at Musgrave's mansion when Leon was absent?"

Irene gave the rascal a quick look, which seemed to say:

"Did you know it was I who went there?"

"I was sent there," she replied.

"By Tully Trenck, of course," put in Kit.

"You wanted to get something which had been forgotten."

Irene nodded.

"What was it, Irene?"

At that moment the eyes of the pair met.

"Why am I telling you all this?" she exclaimed. "After all, you are making a traitress out of me."

"You are saving yourself, my dear," was the response. "You have got to cut loose from Tully Trenck very soon or go down with him."

Irene seemed to think just then that she was

not bettering her condition by going over to the two rascals who had entrapped her.

The shrewd convict appeared to read her thoughts.

"Maybe you don't think the change you are making very beneficial," laughed Kit. "Well, Irene, it is better to have two on your side in a case of this kind than one. You recollect that you lost your ring—"

"And that the keen detective, Phil Fox, picked it up? No, I haven't forgotten that. Tell me how, if he found it, it fell into your hands."

"By and by, Irene," replied the convict.

"When Barry comes back we will understand one another better. You know where the will is? That is good. Now, we want it."

Irene made no answer.

"You have been wondering ever since you came here why I am pursuing this course. You know—you cannot help it—that I have helped Tully Trenck in his game up till now. Irene, a man has to help himself sometimes." And again the old sinister smile came to Kit's lips. "Tully Trenck is a man of more names than one. You know that, woman. You know that he is Mr. Riley Dwyer for you have just left his house. In one part of New York he is Tully Trenck, in another he masquerades as Riley Dwyer—a part which he plays to perfection. I could name another part of the city where he sometimes appears under a third alias which he also wears with his usual grace. Irene, the time is coming when Tully Trenck will throw off on his friends. The law will accept his word before it would take mine with substantial proof. You have heard something of my life. You may know that I am better known as Diamond Dunn than as Kit Kline. I don't see why you should hesitate to mate with me when, by doing so, you feather your own nest and purchase immunity for the future. I can play the genteel man just as neatly as Tully Trenck plays it now. All I want is money to gild the character a little. You won't fear the Broadway sleuth when you are Mrs. Dunn because," Kit seemed to lower his voice when he reached this point, "because there will then be no sleuth to trouble you. What we want is the old will, Irene—the one which Penwork the forger copied in part for Tully Trenck. Give me that and by Heaven! we will have the million instead of the man who is playing for it so secretly and tenaciously, and then I can laugh at him, and name my own price."

Irene Nims listened like a person spellbound to the cool rascal till he finished.

"If you have hoped to become Tully Trenck's wife because you know so much, throw that hope to the winds," continued Kit. "He won't marry you because he doesn't want one of his tools for a wife. He may know your past, Irene; he evidently does. I know it, too, ha, ha! but never mind that. We are birds of a feather, my dear, and, as such, should flock together for mutual protection and advancement. Don't you see, eh?"

Before Irene could reply the door opened and Black Barry came in accompanied by a man who was strange to her.

Half an hour later Irene Nims let herself into the house occupied by Riley Dwyer, and when she had locked herself in an up-stairs room she threw herself into a chair and exclaimed:

"The die is cast! I am the wife of the most infamous jail-bird in America!"

CHAPTER XXIV.

FALSE COLORS.

THAT same night and at nearly the identical hour when Irene realized her terrible situation a man appeared in a narrow street, and on a spot where the light of the nearest lamp shed no ray.

He seemed thoroughly familiar with the neighborhood, for all at once he dodged into an alley darker than the street itself and vanished.

Some time afterward he came to light again, but this time he was surrounded by four walls. In his right hand was a dark-lantern which threw a bull's-eye of light on one of the walls, and his left held a cocked revolver.

The lower part of this man's face was covered with a black mask, above the top of which burned two eyes like stars of fire.

"I've come to quiet Barry's fears," growled the hidden lips. "He takes queer notions for a man who has had his experience. Don't I know that the game is still in the trap, and that it will remain there till the day of judgment? I'm no fool who does things of this sort in a slipshod way. There's too much at stake in this game. More than money, says I—a good deal more," and the man shrugged his shoulders as if one of the things at stake—the one more precious than money—was a human neck.

He crossed the room without making much noise, though he was not in slippers nor his stocking feet, and opened a door which revealed a flight of steps that soon lost themselves in darkness like the ones Leon descended at Mag Manacle's.

The descent looked steep and dangerous, but the glim threw a ball of red light ahead, and the man shut the door behind him as he went down.

He soon found himself in a sort of cellar. Crossing this in turn he reached a door that seemed to be imbedded in solid masonry. He now put up the revolver as if he knew he would have no use for it where he was, and set his lantern on the ground.

"What's the use?" he asked himself in an audible voice. "Here's I've come—for what?—to know what I already know."

Just above the door four lines were discernible. They formed a complete square hardly half a foot across, and the man's hand was there in a moment.

A little work sufficed to remove a section of the wall within the square, and the lantern was picked up from the floor and held in such a manner that it would throw its light into the opening.

The man in the black mask tiptoed alongside the door and looked through the opening.

He saw that the light was shining on a wall some feet beyond the one from which he had taken the brick.

It made a circle of reddish light which enabled him to see the wall from top to bottom.

"I told him so, and if he was here I'd convince him," he exclaimed with an air of satisfaction. "I don't keep whom he thought he saw when he went after the preacher. He would take it all back if he could look into yon cellar and see what I've just seen. If he don't believe me when I report, he can come down here and see for himself."

He dropped solidly on his feet once more, drew the bull's-eye of the lantern from the opening and restored the brick.

After which he retraced his steps, going up the narrow stair, and reappeared in the room above where we introduced him to the reader.

Shortly afterward he came back to the narrow street with the poor light, but the mask of black velvet was on his face no longer, and instead those who saw it when they met him saw the face of Kit Kline, the man of six prisons.

What had the villain seen in the dungeon beyond the walled-up door in the cellar? He had looked through a small opening upon a sight that gave him intense pleasure for his eyes glistened while he looked, and there was a cruel but triumphant smile around the mouth hidden by the mask.

Kit went down the street some distance when he left it for a wider one which he followed till it brought him to a house with which from his manner he seemed to be acquainted.

"I'd probably raise a scene if I went in there," he observed as he looked at the building from the sidewalk. "I have cause for recollecting my last visit, and my manner of coming away. One of these days, and it isn't far off, either, I'll make somebody sweat for my banishment. Sell your vile stuff and rake in the dollars while you may, Mag Manacle. I feel your fingers at my throat though that was years and years ago, and when I get fixed I'll spring on you a trap that will crush you—giantess though you are!"

It seemed to do Kit Kline good to send these words in hissing sentences toward the house from which came now and then, whenever the door opened, the sound of revel-voices of men and the clinking of glasses.

Once he appeared on the eve of entering himself, but he drew off at last and pursued his way.

Some distance from Mag's place he entered a building, and came out a little later in a suit of clothes that rendered him quite respectable in appearance.

Instead of the full beard which he sometimes wore, he sported mustache and imperial which change made him almost entirely unrecognizable.

The convict went up-town, riding in a car like honest people and touching elbows with those who would have shrunk from the collision if they had dreamed of his identity.

"It's not too late to get an opinion," remarked the convict to himself as he alighted from the car and got his bearings in a moment. "If Mag thinks I've lost the young man just because she ran him off she's the most mistaken woman in Gotham to-night."

Three minutes later Kit walked up the steps of an elegant house and struck a summons on the knocker.

For a while there was no response of any kind and when he was beginning to think that he had come up-town on a fool's errand the door was opened.

Kit stepped back and touched his hat politely to a young man who stood in the lighted corridor.

"Mr. Larimore, I believe?" remarked the crook.

"That is my name, sir."

"I am Mr. Dukes, the Chicago friend of Mr. Musgrave, the gentleman who lives here."

All this time Leon was looking at the deceptive face and the coal-black eyes of the greatest rascal in New York.

"I have just arrived," continued Kit before Leon could so much as begin a response. "I trust Mr. Musgrave will pardon this call—"

"Mr. Musgrave is dead."

The jail-bird counterfeited amazement in an admirable manner.

"Dead?" he exclaimed. "Why, you take my breath."

Leon smiled faintly.

"He wrote me three weeks since an urgent letter, and its contents must stand responsible for my appearance here."

"Had you known him very long?" questioned Leon.

"For ten years at least. He was a friend from the first, and when I left the secret force he wrote me to come to New York and try my luck here in the same channels."

The last words appeared to strike the young secretary.

"Do you mean that you have been a detective?" he asked eagerly.

"I have been one of Pinkerton's men," smiled the false Mr. Dukes.

"Then I would like to have you walk in," and Leon held the door open as he stepped back.

As a matter of course Kit did not refuse the very invitation for which he had schemed.

He was entirely satisfied with his play thus far, and with considerable self-exultation he followed Leon into the hallway.

There, under the mellow light of the rich chandelier, he took a seat, and turned to his victim.

"So my friend is dead?" he ejaculated, glancing at the appointments of the room, which were elegant. "He left somebody well fixed, I dare say: but, if I mistake not, from what he told me one day, he was a gentleman with no family."

"He had neither wife nor children," answered Leon, who did not see in the man before him the person from whom he had escaped at Mag Manacle's.

"So! But he gave his wealth to some one, I presume."

"Of course—to some one. But the will was stolen."

Kit, whose eyes were wandering, again turned quickly to Leon at the last word.

"A crime connected with my friend's death, eh?" he exclaimed.

"Yes."

"Maybe I have not come to New York for nothing, after all. Would you mind putting me in possession of the facts as they exist?"

"It is hardly necessary now, I think, as the will is claimed to have been found."

"You put detectives on the track, then?"

"We did, sir."

"I know some of the sleuths of New York," observed Kit.

"Do you know Phil Fox?"

"Not personally, sir, but his name is not strange to me. Was he the man who recovered the will?"

"No, sir."

"I would have drawn from your question that you put him on the trail."

"We did; but he did not find the paper that has come to light."

"Where is Mr. Fox now? I have in hand a bit of business that might require the services of a good detective—one who is thoroughly acquainted with New York, which I am not, coming from the West, you know. Of course, you have Mr. Fox's address?"

"His office is number —, lower Broadway, but you would not find him in, were you to call," replied Leon, painfully, as he thought of his efforts to find the missing detective, and the unsolved mystery.

"Thank you, anyway," continued Kit Kline. "I will not forget the number. When would I be likely to see him?"

Leon did not know.

Indeed, he could not form an idea about Phil Fox's return. He went off mysteriously, probably on a trail of some kind, and there was no telling when he would be in to callers.

Once it was on Leon's lips to tell Mr. Dukes all, but something kept the words back. Perhaps he did not have quite confidence enough in his visitor's identity, and then he had not given up hopes of finding the Gotham sleuth himself.

A short time after he obtained this information, the convict brought the interview to a close.

He had accomplished his purpose, which was twofold.

He had seen the inside of the Musgrave house, and had heard from the secretary's lips enough to tell him that the mystery hanging over the detective's disappearance was still unsolved.

He was deceived, however, when he believed that Leon thought Phil Fox would return shortly of his own accord.

Leon believed nothing of the kind.

The young man feared that the Broadway sleuth had fallen into the hands of the enemy, and more—that that enemy was about to win the deep, dark game for the million.

When Kit left the house he chuckled to himself, and Leon did not suspect till afterward that he had entertained the cool rascal who had silenced the Genteel Spotter.

CHAPTER XXV.

THE EMPTY TRAP.

SAM SHARPE got out of the hospital sooner than was expected.

The surgeon in charge remembered his promise to the gentleman sleuth to have his man up inside of two weeks, and worked to that end; but nature proved even a better assistant than she usually does in such cases, and Sam was out long ahead of time.

When discharged, the detective's spy went straight to the little office on Broadway. The door was locked, and he was kept out.

A shade of disappointment overspread Sam's face as he tried the knob again and again, and at last he turned away with a deeply drawn sigh.

At the door below he was met by a man who seemed to be watching for some one, for when Sam started off he had the man close at his heels.

"Silent yet, but as cunning as a fox!" exclaimed the trailer, keeping his man in sight despite the crowds that jostled him on Broadway. "He's liable to give a fellow some trouble if he has his senses about him. Of course he did not find the New York ferret up-stairs, so I wonder where he's going now?"

It was a warm summer day, and Sam Sharpe led his tracker down to the Battery, under whose trees one-half of New York appeared to have sought shelter from the broiling rays of the sun.

Sam sauntered among the people there till he found a vacant seat, which he occupied at once, and crossed his legs for rest and reflection.

"Hello! this looks like an appointment, but it can't be that!" exclaimed the man who had watched Phil Fox's spy from the Broadway office. "I will know to a certainty now whether the night-cat came away from the hospital with his tongue in trim."

The spectacle that had drawn the exclamation from the man, was not an unusual one for the Park.

A young man had saluted Sam Sharpe, and had taken a seat at his side.

It was Leon.

Gliding forward the watcher, who was a well-built person, well-dressed, and the possessor of two eyes which seemed to see everything, drew up behind a tree a few feet back of the bench, and prepared to listen.

"So you are out at last, Sam?" exclaimed Leon, looking up into the face of the man who had recognized him. "Of course you have not seen the captain yet."

Sam shook his head.

"Is it true that those stabs deprived you of the power of speech?"

The spy nodded, and reaching into an inner pocket he drew forth a small slate and pencil.

Then leaning forward he wrote rapidly:

"Where is the captain?"

Leon took the pencil from his hand.

"He has been missing for five days," he wrote.

Sam started and fixed his eyes on the young secretary.

"What has happened? You can tell me, for I can hear as well as ever."

Leon proceeded, and gave Sam an account of everything pertaining to the plot and the detective's trail as he knew it from the fatal night when he was ambushed and left for dead on the floor of the office on Broadway.

"Something else has happened, Sam," exclaimed Leon. "A will has been recovered, and Tully Trenck holds the estate that belonged to Monckton Musgrave. I am no longer a dweller in the old house where I lived so long. Tully invited me to keep my rooms there, but his words sounded like drops of water falling from an icicle upon red-hot iron, so I did not stay, as you may suppose. He is installed there like a nabob—"

Sam's touch broke the young man's sentence.

"Is it the real will?" his pencil wrote. "Is it the one you had taken from you by the two men?"

"No! of course it's an entirely different paper; but what can I prove without Captain Phil?" cried Leon. "Aida, too, is missing—has been since before Phil's disappearance. I haven't given up the hunt. I don't intend to surrender it till the villains are brought to justice. My oath is to that effect, and I intend to see that it is kept to the letter."

"I will help you," wrote Sam, while his eyes caught a sudden glitter of eagerness.

"I knew you would. I have been waiting for your discharge. You came away from the hospital sooner than I expected. Now, we will make the rascals wince."

"Mebbe so, young man," chuckled the listener behind the tree. "You seem to be counting your chicks even before the eggs are laid. Don't get too previous. There's many a fatal slip between you and success. By Heaven! a good many slips of the kind, I should say."

"I wish I could go back to the occurrences of that night," Sam went on in his enforced way. "But it seems to be blotted out of my mind. They have tried to set me right at the hospital; they have told me how I was found, and all about it, but I can't fill the blank. It is very strange," and the spy smiled.

"Won't you never fill it, Sam?" asked Leon, eagerly.

The man shook his head.

"One of the doctors—a young man who was a surgeon in the German army—gives me some encouragement, and I cling to it, of course."

"That is something, Sam."

Sam Sharpe's face brightened for a moment, and then a shadow, with a good deal of sternness in it, chased the brightness away.

"I can begin where I left off," he wrote. "You can help me, Leon. We will go back to the trail. I fear that the enemy have entrapped Captain Phil. I know something about the case, and if Tully Trenck is where you say he is, we will see whether he has a right to what he holds. Because they have silenced me, they must not think that I am out of the game."

"Of course you're not out of the game!" cried Leon. "You and I are in it more than ever from this moment. When are you going to begin your trail, Sam?"

"Right away."

Sam Sharpe shut his slate and put it up. The man watching the pair from the tree could see that the spy of the lost sleuth was animated by some determined purpose.

He watched Sam and Leon walk away and followed them some distance, but left them abruptly and darted up a side street.

This man was Kit Kline, the hero of six prisons, and as he walked rapidly his brows contracted more than once like the brows of a man perplexed.

"I don't want that silent fellow in the game; we can't afford to have him there!" he muttered. "I don't care so much for the other for he isn't going to hurt any one very much. However, if he gets in the way, why, we'll crush him, too. Of course Tully Trenck is playing nabob, to his own satisfaction at least. The girl is missing, too, Leon informs Sam Sharpe. The girl? Let me see."

Before Kit could reflect his arm was touched by some one on the street, and he looked into a face which he recognized at once.

"Where were your eyes the other night?" cried the man who stopped the convict.

"Why, Barry?"

"There's nothing in the dungeon."

Kit Kline's optics seemed about to start from his head.

"Have you—"

"Yes, I've been there," interrupted Barry. "If you want to investigate for yourself you will come with me."

"Let us go, then."

The two men started off, and while they left one street for another Kit acquainted his comrade with his discoveries in the Park.

"Out is he!" ejaculated Black Barry. "The man is dangerous if he can't talk. I never like those hounds that make no noise on the trail."

"But what does this one know? Nothing, only what Leon tells him. He admits himself that he has no recollection of the doings of that night, and so there's no proof. Nothing can get him back on that trail. We'll hear from Irene to-night. She's back in her old quarters as Tully Trenck's housekeeper, and she will have something to say when we see her."

"But the empty cellar, Kit?"

"I want to see it first."

The comrades entered a narrow alley and unlocked the side door of a house.

In a little while they stood in a cellar so dark that it had to be illumined by the rays of a bull's-eye lantern before they could see any thing.

"The door is solid," observed Kit glancing at one of the walls.

"Solid enough," was the reply.

The convict went forward and removed a square piece of the wall, then he stood on tiptoe and looked through the opening at which he held his lantern at the same time.

"It seems to be empty," said he dropping back and looking at Barry.

"It is empty! The object lying in the corner is a dummy. I told you the other night that I saw the ghost of Phil Fox but you laughed. It was no ghost, Kit. It was the sleuth himself!"

The convict went back to the opening, and for several minutes he kept his lantern there.

"That thing fooled me the other night," he exclaimed, meeting his comrade's question with a grin. "The sleuth of New York has beaten us, Barry, but it is for a spell only. We must turn and strike at once. There must be no foolishness next time."

"We must strike soon, too," was the quick answer. "If Phil Fox wins we never touch one dollar of the wealth Tully Trenck will be forced to disgorge."

"Come!"

Kit Kline turned away with an oath which accorded well with Black Barry's feelings at the time.

"Don't you want to look into the dungeon to see how the detective succeeded?" asked Barry.

"No. Why look at an empty trap? The rat is out, that's enough to know."

"The sand-bag should have descended with a little more force."

"Curse the sand-bag! It isn't that, Barry. The trap failed to hold the rat we put in it. The milk is on the ground, and I want no tears

over it. You forget that a million trembles in the balances."

"More than the million, Kit, I'm thinking."

"Yes," grated the convict. "More than that." And with these words leaving an ominous echo behind, the two men left the house and emerged from the narrow alley.

About an hour after these events Irene Nims, who stood at the front window of a room in the house once owned and occupied by Monckton Musgrave, started at sight of a signal from a man whom she had been watching some time.

She turned away with a white face.

"Who was that man, Irene?" asked a voice, and the woman fell back from the penetrating eyes of Tully Trenck who had just entered the room.

"What man?" inquired Mrs. Nims.

"The one who passed the window a moment ago? I saw the peculiar signal thrown. It was well done, too."

"I saw nothing," answered Irene, assuming a sudden boldness.

"No double plays, woman!" laughed the man. "If that man is a suitor fair and square, say so; if you are playing a secret game against me you'll wish you had never been born!"

Irene was speechless till urged to talk, and then she said with a laugh that the man was a friend—nothing more.

She dared not say that she had just seen her convict husband.

CHAPTER XXVI.

A COOL DEMAND.

MR. BALDIMORE BEYCE, the Independent Detective, went up a notch or two when the city found out that the discovery and capture of the document stolen from Leon, the secretary, was owing to his acumen.

The man put on new airs and became a distinguished person. In short, he was like the man who awoke one morning and found himself famous.

The discovery placed Tully Trenck in quiet possession of Monckton Musgrave's estate. It amounted, all told, to nearly one million dollars, and when the matter had been settled Mr. Trenck stepped quietly into the detective's office and had a private interview.

This occurred on the afternoon of the day that witnessed Kit Kline's astonishing discovery in the cellar with the walled-up door.

When the new-made nabob left the sleuth's office he wore a pleased expression which would have assured the stranger that he was at peace with the whole world.

But he was far from it.

The shadows of night were falling again when Tully Trenck's door-bell tinkled musically in the hall, and as Mrs. Nims was not near to answer the summons, that ady being out somewhere, he answered it himself.

"Ho!" he exclaimed at sight of the man on the step. "I was not expecting you, but walk in."

The caller obeyed at once, and Tully Trenck ushered him into the lighted library redolent of the perfumes of a good cigar.

"Comfortably installed, I see," observed the visitor who was Kit Kline, and he glanced round the room with an air of inspection. "It wasn't this way a few days ago, eh?"

Tully Trenck started slightly and remarked that his circumstances were somewhat improved.

"Improved? ahem! I should gently remark," returned the convict. "It strikes me that you're more comfortably fixed than most men. You must think there can be no slip now."

Tully Trenck moved uneasily in his chair, and cast a glowering look at the cool rascal who had been in his employ.

"From Mr. Muggles to Mr. Trenck isn't much of a step if one knows how to take it," continued Kit. "Mr. Riley Dwyer was a midway station, I presume—a mere diversion, by the way."

The schemer colored.

"I presume you have heard of the discharge," the convict went on.

"What discharge?" asked Trenck, quickly.

"The patient is out again."

"The patient?"

"Sam Sharpe."

"No, I had not heard of it," and Tully Trenck put on a look of indifference which Kit at once observed.

"He got out to-day, and the doctors pronounce him cured as far as their skill can go."

"You see the man is nothing to me," Tully Trenck said. "It wasn't my blunder, ha, ha!"

The laugh brought no responsive merriment into the convict's eyes.

He merely crossed his legs and looked at the man before him.

"No, not your blunder. I'll admit that," he assented. "But do you know that these bounds that do not bark are the worst ones on a trail? Do you know, also, that Sam Sharpe has left him certain wits that may prove just as dangerous as those accredited to the man whose spy he was at the time?"

"But what can he do with the directing brain silent?" questioned Tully Trenck.

A quiet smile appeared at the jail-bird's mouth.

"I'm not here to answer that," was the reply.

"My business with you is to talk money."

The man said this so coolly that Tully Trenck saw that he was dealing with a studied villain.

"I don't catch your meaning," he responded. "I think we closed our business some days ago, and your last words assured me that you were about to quit the city."

"They did, eh? I am here still, as you see. Mr. Trenck, as you are so comfortably fixed, I must ask for a loan which my present circumstances demand."

Tully Trenck's lip quivered.

"This was entirely out of the bargain—"

"To Hades with the bargain!" thrust in the convict, and his silken hand closed on his knee, and in full sight. "You ought to be the last man to object to a loan of the kind I want."

"What is it?—the sum I mean."

Perhaps Tully Trenck thought that the quickest way to dispose of his visitor would be to grant his petition though it would open the door for more visits of the same nature.

Kit the convict was not backward.

"I want one hundred thousand," said he as if he was speaking of an every-day matter, and not of a great sum of money.

The wrong man in the wrong house gave him a stare of amazement.

"I haven't seen that amount of money in all my life!" he exclaimed.

"But you have it at your command," was the quick answer flashed back from the man near by.

"You possess the egg of gold laid by the goose—not exactly for you, but it is yours all the same. I don't ask for the money without some showing. I ask it in the shape of a loan. I'll give you my note."

Despite the gravity of the situation, Tully Trenck could not keep back a smile. The idea of him holding a note from such a notorious villain as Kit Kline alias Diamond Dunn! If he were to die, such a piece of paper was the last thing he would want to turn over to his executor.

Meantime Kit sat in the chair calmly waiting for his reply.

"You promised—"

"I promised what?" snapped Kit showing his teeth and dropping the lifted leg. "See here, pard. You need not go back and bring up the supposed settlement. I won't stand it. The loan is in your power to grant, and I want it to-night—now!"

"But I don't keep that much money about me."

Kit glanced toward the desk at Tully Trenck's right hand.

"You keep paper which is good for ten times the sum when properly signed," he replied. "I'm anxious to get away, and as the man is out of the hospital, don't you see that my absence from the city fastens your title to this fortune?"

"Not exactly."

"Oh, you don't fear Sam Sharpe!" cried Kit. "You believe that he will always keep a silent tongue in his head, and a defective memory as well. I presume I couldn't convince you that the Broadway spotter was likely to appear on the scene sometime."

Tully Trenck gave a quick start and changed color.

"I mean nothing in particular. I hope I haven't disturbed you," resumed Kit, with a smile and gesture. "Let us get back to the loan. It is eight o'clock now, and I have a very important engagement at nine."

The keen-eyed convict saw Tully Trenck bite his lip as he wheeled his chair toward the desk.

"I loan you a sum to-night. To-morrow your companion comes for one," he suddenly exclaimed, looking at Kit.

"I am not, Barry," was the response. "If you can't accommodate us when we need accommodation, why didn't you do the work yourself, eh?"

The jail-bird's voice sunk to a sarcastic whisper as he finished, and the leer in his eye was the leer of a devil.

Tully Trenck opened the desk and Kit craned his neck forward.

Among a lot of papers lay a handsome silver-mounted self-cocking revolver, and, as it caught the rich man's eyes he felt a thrill pervade his frame.

Kit saw the weapon at the same moment.

He raised himself noiselessly from the chair, and as he straightened he saw Tully Trenck's fingers tighten round the silvered butt.

"I don't want that—I want the loan!" he cried, at the schemer's ear, and the next instant the weapon dropped to the bottom of the desk with a thud. "Come! come! pard. The pen instead of the trigger! I am not here to parley."

"No!" grated Tully Trenck, and he shut the desk as he looked up at the convict with the air of a man who suddenly resolves to play a bluff game. "I suppose you have threats enough in store for me if I refuse to be bled."

"No threats at all. I act," answered Kit, meeting Trenck's look with one that paid him back, with interest. "You refuse, then?"

There was no reply, but Tully Trenck, with his hand on the closed lid of the desk, leaned back and gave the convict a series of triumphant looks.

"Keep your paper!" cried Kit. "As I have just said, I make no threats."

"I understand you, for you don't speak in riddles," was the retort. "I am Tully Trenck—a man who is known where you dare not show your face. There is no written bargain between us. I can go out and deny that I ever had doings with you, and your oath would weigh as nothing against me. I thought it would come to this sometime, and I am not unprepared. Dare you accuse me of anything—you, the convict of six penitentiaries—the escaped felon of at least three of them? Why, I could send you up for a long term with the oath of Mag Manacle who choked you once in the prison yard of Joliet. What is it you want, sir?—One hundred thousand dollars? Ha, ha! I never pay a man twice. There is now an impassable gulf between Tully Trenck and the convict blackmailer."

Kit Kline heard these stinging words with the aspect of a man frozen suddenly into a statue.

He was thunderstruck, but when he caught second breath he found that his head had not been knocked altogether from his shoulders.

"These are your tactics, are they?" laughed Kit. "It's what I call a square game of bluff with the best cards apparently in your hand. Very well, pard; if you think you can win, go ahead. I'll leave you to play the hand out."

It is possible that the man in the library chair never forgot the look which followed these words—never, to his dying day.

As Kit the felon uttered them he put on his hat, and stepped back.

"You have a hand, too, you think," spoke Tully Trenck, following him with a look. "You don't want to forget that the shadows of three prisons where you are wanted hang over you at this minute."

"Just as if I would run from them!" broke in the convict, and then he raised his hand till it hovered above his head like a hammer of fate.

"Wot's three prison shadows to a man who has passed twenty years of his life in a dungeon cell?" he cried. "While you're on the subject of future punishment, pard, mebbe you'd better think somethin' about the shadow of a sheriff's noose! Good-night, Mr. Trenck."

Kit Kline had reached the front door before the man in the library moved. The last sentence seemed to have stunned him.

"My God! I must stop that cool devil!" cried he, bounding from the room; but the door had shut and the convict was gone.

More than this, Kit Kline was already on the sidewalk, and his eyes were riveted upon a figure like a statue a few yards away.

"Now for some quick work," he muttered. "The ferret is again on the trail."

CHAPTER XXVII.

IRENE IN THE TOILS.

KIT KLINE, the convict, was not mistaken.

The man supposed to be silenced was again at work.

After watching the statue like a shadow a few moments Kit hurried off.

He had accomplished very little by his visit to Tully Trenck.

The man of a million could be as cool as a brigand when the occasion called for coolness; he could look into the face of his desperate tool and laugh with all the derision of a triumphant fiend.

He knew that the word of Kit, the convict, would not weigh against his in a court of law; he knew, too, that the rascal, wanted, as he really was, by three prisons, would never play an open hand.

Therefore, Tully Trenck, in the full possession of Monckton Musgrave's money, felt that he could laugh at the blackmailer and bid him do his worst.

"I would like to see that villain lift the hand he threatens me with," exclaimed the plotter, as he walked back to the library. "I sent an arrow home when I told him that the shadows of at least three penitentiaries darkened his path, no matter which way he turned. He knows that as well as I do. Wanted a hundred thousand, did he? He strikes high for the first pull. Well, the sum he got wouldn't buy a beer at a free-lunch counter. I should say not," and Tully Trenck laughed again over what he was pleased to call his signal victory.

His merriment had not ceased when a footfall warned him that he was not alone, and the next moment he saw Irene in the doorway.

"Aha! the very person I would see," exclaimed he, as the woman seemed in a quandary.

"Come in, Irene. I've had a visitor. Did you meet any one on the street just now?"

Irene Nims had taken the chair just vacated by Kit Kline, and was shaking her head before the speaker was at the end of his question.

"You did not see him, eh?" continued Tully Trenck. "Well, he must have vanished in a jiffy. I've heard of insolent fellows in my time, but he carries off the palm. What do you think he wanted, Irene?"

"I could not guess."

"My visitor was Kit Kline, and he played the first card of the new game."

The woman seemed to start slightly.

"He wanted only one hundred thousand," the man went on. "You see how modest he is. I presume Black Barry is blessed with modesty of the same sort, and that I will be treated to a sample of it before long. But the fellow ran against a spear that penetrated deeper than he thought. He had a lot of covert threats in store, and his disappointment could not help uncovering them. I never realized till a while ago the true character of that infamous jail-bird. You told me once, Irene, that I would find the pair out some day and suffer for it. I have found them out, but I shall not suffer by it. Not I!"

Tully Trenck leaned forward and spoke the last words in a meaningful whisper.

"You told him—" faltered Irene.

"I laughed at the scoundrel!" interrupted the man. "I told him that he stood in the shade of too many prisons to carry out one of his threats, and I sent him away without one dollar of the sum demanded. They can't bleed me, Irene. When I get the upper hand of a thorough rascal like Kit Kline, *alias* Diamond Dunn, I hold it for an emergency. He went off beaten. Now I'd like to see him strike!"

There was a glow on Tully Trenck's cheeks as he leaned back in his chair after this and looked at Irene Nims.

If he had suspected the secret that woman carried in her bosom, he might have used other language, but he knew nothing of the ties that bound her to the felon.

"Well, Irene, how is the bird?" suddenly asked Tully Trenck. "You have just come from the cage, of course?"

"I looked in a moment," was the reply.

"She is all right yet, eh?"

"She is there."

"But as obdurate as ever?"

"I did not try her."

The man drummed on the desk a second with his knuckles, and then proceeded.

"Don't you think you can fetch her around?" he asked, turning to Irene.

"It has been tried, you know."

"Yes," observed Trenck petulantly. "When you found on her person a letter to Phil Fox, the Broadway sleuth, I knew that she knew more than I had given her credit for knowing. Then I discovered that the girl was dangerous, and I wished that I had left her where she was. Irene?"

"Well?"

"Go back to the cage."

"When?"

"Now."

The woman appeared to exhibit some aversion.

"Make her one more proposition," continued Tully Trenck. "You need not tell her that it is to be the last, but your language can leave that impression. You know how to word it, Irene."

The woman sat in the chair waiting for him to go on.

"Say to her that the oath and the departure will fetch her twenty-five thousand dollars," resumed Tully Trenck. "You see I have added to the first offer?"

Irene bowed.

"If she refuses—"

"Then tell her that I am done!" cried the man. "Tell her in words that will take away every ray of hope. Say that the sleuth whose spy she was will never find another trail—that he is forever silenced, and that she is lost to the world. You will do this, Irene. You will do it now. Come straight back to me. I will be here."

These words dismissed the woman as plainly as a command could have done.

She left the chair slowly and looked down into the face of the man in the chair.

"Don't you want to go?" he asked.

She came toward him and stopped at his side. "It is not that," she answered, clearing her throat with an effort. "I do not think it will be of any use. That girl will not accept freedom at any price short of—"

"Short of what, Irene?"

"You know," and there was a smile at the woman's lips.

"Fires of Hades! she never gets *that*!" he flashed. "Why, the girl is foolish. Does she think that we will give up the game and see her walk off with the prize? No! I've played too many games, and so have you, woman. If this is what keeps you back don't let it detain you. I want the last proposition made now."

"It shall be done."

Irene Nims left Tully Trenck alone. She went up-stairs to a small room the door of which she looked behind her.

"Two masters!" she laughed to herself while her face was almost without color. "I am bound to each with an oath, but to one by ties that make my life a living torture. The time is near at hand when I must betray one. Which one?"

Irene stood in the middle of the room, and at that moment caught the reflection of her face in the glass.

It was ghostly.

"When the time comes I will face the ordeal," she sent through her teeth. "The bird in the cage is dangerous as long as she remains there. What does Tully Trenck intend to do with her? Why does he hesitate when he knows that she holds the secret that can wreck his hopes and mine? Has the man, so bold at first, turned coward when he most needs his nerve? So the sleuth is out of the way, and his spy has a tongue that can betray no one! That is all right as far as it goes. But the girl is the stumbling-block. When I had my hand at her throat and tore from her bosom the letter to her master why didn't I grip a little harder? I could have done it, and then—then there would be none of this. Now I stand between two fires, and destruction comes when a young girl opens her mouth. Tully Trenck, I've a mind to play a hand of my own—one of those certain hands that clear the way of all obstacles. I don't want to stand up in court as the wife of a convict and the sworn tool of a man as guilty as he. My God! why was I drawn into this? I wish I had never seen the light of day. But, as I am in the net, I must go through with the play."

Irene Nims left the house without going back to the man in the library.

He heard her pass out, and a smile of satisfaction stole over his face.

"Faithful still," he remarked. "With the hold I have on her, Irene will do my every bidding."

Already the woman was on the street, hurrying along like a specter.

She had veiled her face, but her keen eyes showed her the way, and in a little time she was in the darkest corner of a car going down-town.

On the rear platform stood a man whom Irene did not notice till the car had carried her several squares.

She did not see him get aboard, consequently she could not tell how long he had been there.

When she began to watch him she knew that her presence kept him on the platform.

He was a good-looking person, apparently forty, with brilliant dark eyes and a blackish beard.

Irene dared not eye him too closely as she would betray herself, but she saw enough of him to tell her that she must avoid him if possible.

The woman believed she had seen those eyes before, but where? The rest of the face was new to her, at least it had no familiar lines.

To be watched by a human hawk like the one on the platform was torture to Irene.

The man kept his place on the platform, Irene hers in the car.

Square after square was passed, the car twisted out of one street and into another.

At last Irene, who had turned her head away for a moment, missed the ferret when she looked again.

Her heart seemed to leap into her mouth.

The platform carried no one but the conductor now. The man was gone!

Irene let the car proceed another square before she left her corner.

She had been carried past her destination, but that was no matter, as she had outsat the man bloodhound of Gotham.

"He should have had a little more patience," inwardly observed Irene, getting up and signaling the conductor. "Phil Fox would not have given up the espionage thus easily."

She stepped from the car and tripped toward the sidewalk lying in the glare of the lamp.

As she touched the curb she recoiled with a cry, which she could not keep back.

"Great heavens! You?" exclaimed Irene.

"Yes, madam," was the answer, in tones full of triumph. "I want to see you privately a few moments. My office is near, and we will proceed thither."

At the same time the man's hand closed on Irene's wrist, and if she had jerked back, as her first impulse prompted, she would not have escaped.

She saw two penetrating eyes fastened upon her, and as her captor uttered the last words, she seemed to make a terrible discovery.

"I know you now," cried she. "But I thought—"

"Yes, yes, I thought so too, for a while, but I am here, Irene!"

And he laughed the same old laugh of victory again.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

THE DETECTIVE'S MATCH.

THE feelings of the female conspirator may be imagined when she found herself in the grip of Phil Fox, the gentleman spotter.

No wonder she stared at him.

To her he was a man back from the dead—a sleuth whom she supposed to have been silenced forever by the mercilese arts of Kit Kline and his companion in villainy.

And now she was going to his office!

It is no wonder that Irene felt a nameless terror take possession of her.

The detective said nothing between his triumphant laugh and the door of his dreaded office, which, sure enough, was but a few steps from the spot where he had caught his prey.

Irene barely recovered her composure between the two places.

She was conducted across the threshold, and to a chair, which she accepted like a person in a strange trance, while Phil Fox—she knew him now, for he had taken off the darkish beard—took one a few feet away.

"You still stick to the old house, I see," began Gentleman Phil, a smile appearing at his mouth while he spoke.

"The old house?" echoed Irene, bewildered.

"Yes—the house where I met you first and quite often afterward. Is it possible, Irene, that you have forgotten me?"

She was looking at the detective steadily now.

"I see! Another revelation!" she exclaimed, falling back in her chair. "You are also Ralph Ringgold the man who came to see Monckton Musgrave often before his death."

"Do you think so?"

"I know it. Of course I know now that you are Philip Fox the detective; then I suspected nothing of the kind."

"If you had there would probably have been a scene or two, eh, Irene?"

The woman did not speak.

"Some of us live double lives," the detective went on. "I was living one when I was beneath the same roof with you as Ralph Ringgold. I did not like to hoodwink you, Irene, but it was essential that I should do so."

"No; you never like to deceive any one," answered Irene, smiling coldly. "Well, you did not find out very much while you played spy in the mansion. There was nothing to be found out."

"Nothing? We might differ here, but we will not argue the point," observed Phil Fox. "I trust you are in no hurry."

"I hope you will not keep me here."

"Not for long perhaps. You are still in Tully Trenck's employ."

Irene seemed to wince under those words. Their arrangement did not appear to suit her.

"I am under the roof that shelters him," said she. "A woman must have a home somewhere, you know."

"And you naturally drifted back to the old house, eh?"

"Yes."

"Irene," and the Broadway ferret leaned toward the woman. "Doesn't Tully Trenck deem it to his advantage to keep you near him?"

Despite the calmness Irene had promised herself she started in her chair.

"I don't see why he should," she replied.

"No? You knew him before he came to the house the day Musgrave died."

"I?"

"Yes. Although you had been but six months in the house, and though Monckton Musgrave had not heard of Tully Trenck for a year, you knew the man fairly well."

Irene fairly lost her breath.

"You are bound to immesh me," she cried, appearing to become indignant. "You detectives are adepts at that game, but I am glad to say, Philip Fox, that you will fail here."

"Didn't you know Tully Trenck before?"

"Before he left the city? Yes."

The confession was somewhat surprising, but it did not mislead the detective.

"And you know another gentleman about as well."

Irene gave him a look of silent inquiry.

"I know a good many gentlemen," said she.

"But this one in particular," persisted the sleuth. "He is one of those people who alters his name to suit circumstances. Sometimes he is known as Diamond Dunn."

The New York ferret almost cut his sentence suddenly, for the look which had come to Irene's face was a revelation.

She had grown as white as marble, and the lips open a moment before were compressed and bloodless.

If she had answered his words with a wild cry and a spring to her feet she could not have betrayed herself more than she did in her efforts to play Sphinx and remain calm.

"Irene, this acquaintance of yours is a fellow of many names and many traps," the detective continued. "Which master do you serve best—Diamond Dunn or Tully Trenck, alias Riley Dwyer?"

The woman was not prepared for a thrust of this sort.

"You are playing what you call a cool, sharp hand," she exclaimed. "I shall refuse to answer. You have no right to put me through an inquisition of this kind merely to carry out some scheme of your own. I am not afraid to submit my past actions to official scrutiny when the proper time comes, but here alone with you I refuse to proceed, Philip Fox."

Irene left the chair and gave the detective a look calculated to add emphasis to her words.

"A cool woman," thought Phil as he looked up into her face which had got back some of its old color. "Let me see if I can't fetch her to her senses. I hold a bomb which I think she doesn't know anything about."

"You will let me go now, will you not?" asked Irene, glancing toward the door.

"Not yet," was the reply.

"Am I under arrest?"

"No."

"Then you have no right to hold me here."

The detective did not appear to have heard the protest.

"So you refuse to confess to an acquaintance with Diamond Dunn, though you own to one with Tully Trenck," he continued. "Let me refresh your memory. First, about an occurrence in Monckton Musgrave's house."

Irene said nothing.

If she had been transformed into a statue of stone, she could not have been more silent.

The city Vidocq watched her closely for a few moments.

"It was the third night from the one that found Musgrave dead," he remarked. "I count backward, you understand, Irene. Between eleven and twelve a woman, who sat at a small table in one of the upper rooms of the house, opened her escritoire and took from a little drawer which she unlocked a little vial done up in tinfoil. She placed before her on the stand a glass with a slender stem. Into this she dropped a few drops of the contents of the vial, and the bottom of the glass took on a reddish hue. When the woman had done this, she put the vial back in the secret drawer and poured some water into the glass. Strange to say, the water seemed to take up the reddish fluid, and while the woman watched, it became clear again. By and by the woman took up the glass, and holding it firmly in her hand, left the little room."

A singular silence followed the detective's words.

It was soon broken by Irene's voice.

"Well, what of it?" she asked, with a look of indifference that perfectly astounded the sleuth. "As you have opened a queer story, I would like to hear the conclusion. The woman left the room with the wine-glass, you say?"

Her very coolness was remarkable.

"Yes," went on the detective; "she went down-stairs with the liquid. She did not stop till she entered the dimly-lighted library, from which to Monckton Musgrave's room there was but a step."

"Why don't you go on?" smiled Irene. "All stories have a climax somewhere; yours can be no exception. From the library to the sick-chamber was but a step, you have said."

"But a step," echoed Phil Fox, whose surprise was on the increase.

"Well, didn't the person who followed the woman down-stairs go to the end with her?"

"I have not said that she was followed."

"No, but you have spun the story like—"

Irene seemed to stop for the proper word.

"Like what, Irene?"

"Like a spy!" cried the woman, and for the first time her eyes lit up as the words came through her teeth.

"You have grown accusative," grinned the ferret, watching the play of expression as revealed by her countenance.

"Why not?" she cried. "I am not blind, Philip Fox. I can see for whom your story is meant. You need not finish it by accusing the woman of murdering Monckton Musgrave. You have done that already; but I stand here in the sight of man and God, and denounce the infamy of your implication."

Irene had suddenly grown into another and distinct person.

"A match for any man," mentally ejaculated the detective, surveying her. "There is more of the wolf than I thought, about you, Irene."

"So I have accused you?" he went on, aloud, and at the same time he arose and stepped toward her. "You seem to be very apt in taking things to yourself, but all vagueness aside, if you would have it so, Irene. Would you believe me if I were to say that I have cast about that woman, unknown to her, a net which can drag her to a fate from which the coolest criminals shrink? Do you stand there and challenge me to open up the past—to drag you to the felon's cell to-night and to-morrow startle the city with the true story of a strong man's exit from life? Is it a challenge your eyes throw at me from behind their dark silken lashes? Woman, you must be stone to stand where you are, unmoved."

She gave him a wild stare which no man could fathom.

"You were a spy, then?" crossed her ashen lips. "You came to the house as Ralph Ringgold, to drag me down—down—down to the lowest depths of perdition!"

"I was there to protect the innocent and the deserving."

"You watched me! You remained in the house when you were thought to be away. But what can you do? Ha, ha! what can you do, after all? If I seal my lips and refuse to reply, the rope you have spun snaps like that!" and as Irene snapped her fingers above her head, she fell in a swoon at the detective's feet!

CHAPTER XXIX.

HEADS OR TAILS?

"SEE here! Do you know whom I saw on the alert to-night?"

"Phil Fox?"

"Phil Fox?"

"Where was he?"

"He was up-town watching the house."

"And you?"

"Hang it all! I was there, too."

The men who exchanged words like these sat in a back room of a den not very far from Mag Manacle's establishment, and there were bottles and glasses before them.

"What were you doing up there? Did you call on the vulture in his new nest?" suddenly resumed one of the men.

"I did nothing else," and the speaker's brow contracted. "He's entirely too 'fly' for me, Barry; altogether too cool and independent."

"What did he say, Kit? He didn't want to cut your acquaintance, I hope?"

"He thinks he has done it effectually, and in his mind from this hour the firm of Muggles & Company stands dissolved."

"The deuce he does!" cried Black Barry his eyes getting a savage glitter as he brought his clinched hand down upon the table. "I had it in my mind that he would not like to walk Broadway with us, but not that he would play a hand like this. Mebbe you irritated him, Kit."

The convict grinned.

"Mebbe I did, Barry."

"Ah! you wanted to tap the barrel perhaps."

The grin became a laugh and the man of six prisons filled his glass before he finished.

"That's what I did," cried he. "I don't believe in one man having it all to the exclusion of those who helped him to it. It's not my doctrine of equality, Barry."

"Nor mine," assented Black Barry through his drooping mustache. "I hope you struck him high enough while you were at it."

"Entirely too high for his blood. That's why he flared up and cut the acquaintance."

"What was the draw, Kit?"

"One hundred thousand."

Although he expected to hear a large sum named, the announcement seemed to take Black Barry's breath.

Kit Kline noticed it.

"Did I hit him hard?" he asked across the table.

"Rather," was the reply. "You did not get it?"

"Not a dollar of the amount. If I had not been quick 'o foot and voice I'd have got something besides the check I was after."

"What?"

"The contents of a derringer upon which his hand dropped when he opened the desk. I had him up to that time, but all at once he resolved to beat me, and he did."

Black Barry looked at his companion, not knowing whether to laugh or growl.

"After that we changed our conversation slightly," Kit went on. "He got holdier as he proceeded, and before he was done he had thrown the gantlet squarely at my feet. I was told that the shadow of three pens lay across my path, and that the word of Kit Kline wouldn't go against his in any court."

"Which is true," observed Barry, watching his comrade closely.

"Yes, but I didn't admit it, you see. When he got to the end of his string, he was told to look out for the shadow of a sheriff's noose."

Barry dropped back.

"Did you go that far?" he exclaimed.

"Yes, I did," snapped Kit.

"What did he say?"

"I didn't stay to see. When I had fired the shot I picked up my hat and walked out. Just as I left the step I saw a figure standing like a statue a few feet away. I didn't have to look twice to know who it was. The ferret was on the alert."

"It was Phil Fox?" answered Barry, and the convict assented with a nod.

"Did he follow you?"

"No."

"Mebbe he made a call in the house."

"I think not."

"Then he expected Tully Trenck to come out?"

"I don't know, I'm sure, but of one thing I'm certain, and that is that the cool man has played fool to-night in his own house."

"What did you play with your threats?"

"I didn't make any. I only told him that a sheriff's noose casts a shadow just as well as prison walls do. It is true, as he shall find out to his eternal cost."

Black Barry looked at his comrade several seconds before replying.

"He'll come down a notch or two," remarked he.

"He will, or by Heaven! he'll learn what it is to cast off the man who made it possible for him to call a million his! Prison shadows!—fudge! They don't frighten me no more than do the shadows of a lamp-post."

"Where is Irene?"

"In the house, I presume."

"She was to meet you to-night."

"Yes, but it is not yet time."

"If she heard—"

"She did not hear, for she wasn't in when I had my interview with him," interrupted the convict.

"Do you think Irene will remain true to us?"

"I have her there!" cried Kit Kline and his

big right hand fell on the table among bottles and glasses and closed there. "Yes, I have her in that hand," he went on looking at his companion. "Irene is in a grip from which she cannot extricate herself. She is my wife and she knows what that means. Let her show signs of weakening—let her even think of betraying us in the slightest particular and that hand will crush her without mercy! I like to crush people of that sort sometimes. There's one I'd like to crush to-night."

"Who's that, Kit?"

"The big tigress of the den."

"Mag Manacle?"

"Yes. She's the person I've hated for years, and somehow or other whenever I think of her I feel fingers at my throat. Before long I intend to show her that I haven't forgotten that morning at Joliet, and when I am through, the Amazon's bower will have lost its greatest attraction!"

"One thing at a time, Kit," smiled Barry.

"I know it. We've got something important in hand just now. The Broadway spotter is on the trail once more. The trap did not hold the rat. While I thought he was rotting in the walled-up dungeon he was picking up a link here and another there, adding to the chain which he began the day we opened the game on Broadway and Pine. I don't care so much for the spy. He talks not, and his head is not as clear as it used to be."

"The young man—"

"Leon, the secretary, eh?" ejaculated Kit. "He's probably got enough of his escape through Mag's underground tunnel. I don't fear the boy. Now, there's two plays before us."

"Well?"

"We want money—at least I do—and we must forever silence this sleuth who is still at large."

Kit ran one of his hands into a pocket and fished up a piece of money which he covered on the table before Barry got to see it.

"Heads for the silencing business right away," he continued, "tails for having my play out with Tully Trenck."

Then he uncovered the coin and both men leaned forward to note the result.

"Heads!" said both in one breath and their eyes met.

"That means death for the dog on the scent!" continued Kit. "I can wait awhile for my money-play. Irene will fetch me some news to-night. It is almost time for me to see her. You don't want to think that she is going to play us false, Barry. As I have told you she is in the fist of Diamond Dunn, the man who knows how to crush!"

Then the two worthies filled their glasses with the remaining contents of one of the bottles, and clinked them in a mutual pledge of success.

Kit Kline left his companion on the street some distance from the place and proceeded alone to the house, which he unlocked with a night-key.

Going to a room he turned on the gas and opened a secret door in the wall.

Into the dark niche he thrust his hand and drew out several papers tied with a piece of tape.

"These will fetch him!" he cried showing his teeth like a pleased hyena. "He doesn't dream that thanks to the woman he trusts I have these documents where I can lay my hands on them at any time."

He read the papers over carefully like a person intent on mastering their contents and it was some time before he put them up.

"Why doesn't Irene come?" he exclaimed getting out of humor as he glanced at his watch. "She knows when she was to meet me here, and she's not so innocent that she does not know what the penalty is for failure."

The convict put the papers back in the wall and took out a cigar.

For an hour longer Kit Kline waited in the room; but nobody came.

All at once he sprang up with an oath.

"She can't afford to do this!" he hissed. "I'll show her that she trifles with her very existence when she fails to fill an engagement with me. Maybe she thinks as Tully Trenck pretends to think—that I dare not show my hand for fear of prison shadows. Bosh! If I am the most wanted in the United States I do not have to fear a woman and her secret."

His rage was still on when he turned the gas off and a moment later he was on the street.

Irene had failed to meet her engagement, and he was hot against her.

"It was heads when I uncovered the coin awhile ago," he muttered as he walked off. "I have to take the sleuth in hand, but I would like to know why Irene failed to come. Did Tully Trenck force her to keep aloof? Has he bought her again? By the souls of the saints! if he has he will find that the price paid this time will take his last dollar!"

If one had followed the convict through the winding streets of New York that night he would have seen him enter a poor looking frame house of three stories in the Italian quarter of "Mulberry Bend."

He did not stop till he had climbed to the last floor, where he knocked at a door, across which appeared, in crooked letters, the legend:

"BARTOLOZZI,
ASTROLOGIST."

The knocks had not died out ere the door was opened, and the felon walked in.

"Ah, my son," squeaked a little old man in a room of filth. "The stars have been waiting for you."

"I'm sorry I've kept them so," answered Kit, walking up to the table, where the gas-jet revealed a few well-worn astrologer's charts and some crusts of bread. "But now that I am here, I want to know what the stars say."

At the same time the convict, credulous over things supernatural, as criminals often are, placed a coin among the dried crusts, and looked at the old wizard.

"Am I going to succeed with what I have in hand? That's what I want to know," he continued.

Bartolozzi, the old Italian, took the soft, big hand of the felon, and held it while he consulted the charts on the table.

"Yes, my son, the first stars give you success," he said, in his cracked tones, as he raised his eyes.

"That's good."

"You will succeed, but the success won't last long."

"I don't care for that!" cried Kit, jerking away his hand. "Now, by Jehu! I know that I've got something in my grip. I can go ahead and kill the dog on the trail." And out he went, and down the crazy stair.

CHAPTER XXX.

THE BLOOD-RED LINK.

"SOMEBODY has been here. That chair was not where it is now when we were here before. You have not been back since, Sam?"

The man to whom these words were addressed shook his head.

"Of course we don't know anything about the visitor," the speaker went on. "If we knew that Captain Phil was alive we might conclude that he has been here. But we know nothing."

Sam Sharpe, the silent spy of the detective, looked at his companion, who was Leon, the young ex-secretary.

The following moment he took his slate and pencil from his pocket, and wrote:

"We will know more by and by."

"I hope we will," answered Leon, reading from the slate. "It maddens me to see Tully Trenck in possession of the fortune to which I know he has no legal right. The infernal conspiracy is on top, Sam. Crime has come off with flying colors, and we—well, to say the least, we have been outtricked."

The spy smiled.

"We'll take the last trick," he scribbled, encouragingly. "I think I picked up an important link to-night."

"About Captain Phil?"

Sam shook his head.

"About Aida, then?"

The spy nodded.

"That's what I want to know!" cried Leon.

"The mystery that hangs over Aida's disappearance seems as impenetrable as that which conceals the detective. We must find the trap into which the girl has fallen, and then the girl herself. If you think we would be likely to hit the trail by going down to Mag's, down we go. You don't think we'd find anything there, eh?"

"Kit Kline, I believe, knows nothing about Aida," wrote Sam. "That wasn't his part of the game."

"No?"

"He played his hand elsewhere," the hand wrote on. "To find the trap that holds Aida, we must watch some one besides Kit and his pard."

Leon looked up and caught the speaker's eye.

"There are only two others to watch," said he.

"You are right," answered the spy's pencil.

"If you will go to your lodgings or elsewhere, so you don't get in my road, I will see what I can do."

"All right. I'm at your command, if I can serve the cause in that way," Leon remarked. "You want to be careful, but I need not admonish you. They have heard ere this that you have left the hospital."

Sam's teeth met firmly as he scrawled:

"They will know before long that I am the worst bound on the scent."

Then the slate was restored to the pocket, and Leon promising to see Sam the following morning, left him in the office which had a memory of mystery for him.

Sam Sharp smiled to himself as he heard the footsteps of the young man go down the stair.

He threw himself into a chair and buried his face in his hands.

Silence came down over the tableau, and continued to envelop it for five minutes, during which Phil Fox's speechless spy did not stir.

Sam was wrestling with the past. He was

struggling with that problem of mystery which hung vaguely in his clouded mind.

He was on the scene of the most important incident of his career, but yet he could not recall a single aspect of it.

The man would have given his life almost to have had a memory unbroken at that moment.

He had the healed dagger-wounds on his body to show that the strange story the doctors told him was not fiction.

He knew that the man who laid in ambush for him in the little office had cut a piece from his life.

He had not the slightest recollection of the terrible occurrence—not a single memory of the assassin's face, and none of the struggle which must have taken place.

Sam had tried a thousand times to go back to that eventful night, but in vain.

He could follow himself during the day that preceded it; but with the shadows of night came utter oblivion.

His silence in the chair after Leon's departure was but another attempt to pick up the lost link.

He struggled then with the mystery as he had never struggled before.

It seemed to him that he must unvail the past or perish.

When Sam looked up, his face showed traces of the gigantic struggle.

He looked at everything around the room, as if hoping that something would unlock the gates of silence.

At last his eyes fell upon a picture hanging against the wall.

He gazed at it for a moment, and then looked across the room to where there were traces of a frame's former tenantry of a certain spot under a nail.

Sam Sharpe shook his head.

He knew that the picture had not always hung where it was.

If he could have written out his thoughts for Leon, he would have said:

"That picture has been changed. Where it hangs now is not the place for it. I don't see what could have induced Captain Phil to take it from the old nail. It ought to go back to where it belongs."

Looking at the picture with a certain intention in his mind, Sam left his chair and walked toward it.

"I'm going to restore it to its place," he must have thought for the next moment he took hold of the frame and lifted it from the peg.

All at once Sam Sharpe fell back, and stared at the spot that had been covered by the picture.

The light seemed to be focused upon it, and he saw on the white wall in dark, blood-like lettering, the name:

"KIT KLINE!"

If the dagger had not tied his tongue, a startling exclamation would have pealed from Sam Sharpe's throat.

As it was, his eyes appeared on the eve of leaping from his head, and the picture slid from his hands and fell to the floor with a loud report.

For some time Sam the silent saw nothing but the name on the wall.

When he moved he stepped forward and inspected it closely.

Was there nothing at work in his mind to tell him that his own hand had made the wild tracery, and that the red ink in which it was written was his own blood?

At length Sam put up his hand and tried to brush the letters out; but his futile attempt to do so brought a curious smile to his lips.

They were there to stay and to name the man who had played tiger in the heart of New York.

Five minutes passed before Sam thought of the picture.

He stooped and picked it up, then carrying it toward the wall he hung it up again over the name it had concealed.

At this time there was a new light in the depths of Sam Sharpe's eyes.

He went back to the chair and once more buried his face in his hand.

The old struggle was on again, but now he had a name to help him.

If Leon had looked in at that moment he would have found Sam silent and motionless in the detective's chair.

Suddenly the spy sprang up.

A bomb touched off under him would not have raised him with more emphasis.

He covered the distance between himself and the picture, then he jerked it from the wall and gazed once more at the name in blood thereon.

Had he regained his mastery of the past, and was the sleuth from that moment no trapper in the dark?

At any rate, Sam had picked up a link of some kind—his countenance showed it—but he made no demonstrations that confirmed it.

After awhile he hung the picture up again, taking care to restore it to the exact position from which he had removed it, after which he

walked slowly from the office locking the door after him.

Down on the street where the air was fresh, he drew one hand across his forehead and started off.

He did not stop till he was at the door of the hospital whose inmate he had lately been, and the janitor surprised one of the surgeons with the announcement that Sam Sharpe had come back.

This surgeon was the one who had taken greatest interest in Sam's peculiar case, and the moment he heard of the man's arrival, he requested that he be shown in at once.

There was a strange twinkle in Sam Sharpe's eyes when he entered the surgeon's private room.

He walked eagerly forward to the little table covered with papers, and caught up a pencil lying there.

"I have found the missing link," he wrote, while the hospital surgeon followed the flying lead with bated breath. "Accident has just given me the clew. You have told me that I would recover the past all of a sudden. I have seen a name which seemed to strike my head like a hammer, breaking the portion that divided the present from the past. It all came to me like a flash. The name did it, and I now know that I wrote that name myself, when I thought I was in the grip of the demon Death."

Sam paused and looked at the surgeon, whose eyes were regarding him fixedly.

He seemed to think: Is this man mad?

"Where is the name, Sam?" half-incredulously asked the hospital doctor.

"On the wall, under the picture some person hung for the purpose of keeping me from the light. I have the whole play at last, and it is plain to me at whose throat I can fly at sight. They have laughed among themselves, no doubt, when they saw me on the street silent among chattering thousands. They know what the doctors have said, and they have believed. Why look after a man who cannot speak, and whose memory is a blank? What can he do? By the swift justice of the living God! this very man comes down the trail like a greyhound with the quarry in sight! This silent dog—this dog with the broken brain—is the worst sleuth in the chase. I've got all back but my speech, and I don't need that to win!"

Sam threw the pencil down and bounded erect.

His eyes were now strangely ablaze, but his figure did not possess a tremor.

The doctor was simply amazed, and could only look.

"You must go slow, Sam," he spoke with a doctor's caution.

The recovered spy shook his head and grinned as if to say:

"Never mind, doctor. I know what I am about."

The following second Sam fell back, and threw a look toward the door.

"Let me talk with you," remarked the surgeon.

Sam snatched up the pencil again and wrote:

"Not to-night. My mission here is ended. I came to tell you that I have linked the ends of the chain together. Once more I am Sam Sharpe the detective spy. Now let me find the game!"

Down went the pencil again, there was the flight of a figure across the room, and the astonished doctor was alone.

CHAPTER XXXI.

THE BROKEN OATH.

As a matter of course, Irene did not join Kit the convict while he waited for her in the old house after separating from Black Barry.

The female conspirator was in the hands of Phil the Detective.

If Kit had known this he might have postponed his visit to Bartolozzi, the Italian fortune-teller.

Tully Trenck, too, waited for Irene's return.

He had sent her on an errand which the gentleman sleuth had interrupted in a very unceremonious way, and as the time wore on and she did not come, he consulted his watch often in the library.

As to Irene herself, she wished she had not left the famous house at all, and more than once she secretly cursed the man who had nabbed her.

Her coolness and courage failed her at last, as we have witnessed, and when she sunk senseless at the detective's feet, she felt that the hour of exposure and vengeance had come.

How long she was unconscious she did not know; but when she came back to life, as it were, she found herself still in the same little office.

Irene looked around bewildered.

She was still in the detective's grip, but where was he?

Suddenly her eyes alighted on a man at a desk, and while she looked he raised his head, and she saw—Phil Fox.

"Aha! you are yourself once more!" exclaimed the sleuth with a smile.

"I am through it, but I am here yet. I want to go."

She crossed to where he was and stood over him with pleading in her face.

"You want to go, eh? Back to which one, Irene?"

The woman seemed to recoil.

"You shall go," continued the sleuth. "You shall take your choice. It matters little to me to whom you go."

Irene did not like his manner of saying these words. There seemed to be something subtle behind them, but her ingenuity could not make out what it was.

"You will sign this paper first," resumed Phil Fox, glancing at the document before him.

"I have just finished it, and it lacks but one thing, your signature, Irene."

Color fled from the woman's face and she trembled when she asked:

"What is it?"

"Ah! can't you guess? I have not made it strong. It embodies a few of the things of which you must have knowledge—your secret visits to Tully Trenck during Musgrave's last and mysterious illness, and his midnight cail at the house the night before Musgrave died. I might have gone further than I have in this paper, but," with another smile, "I did not want to make it too strong. I have also mentioned that a few days before the death a veiled woman received a mysterious packet from a man on the street—"

"My God!" cried Irene. "You are without an atom of mercy in your composition, Phil Fox. You resemble all your kind."

"Perhaps. In one respect we are alike; we like to hunt down the guilty."

Irene said nothing; her eyes were on the paper again.

"Here is a place for your name, you see," he went on, looking up into her face and holding the pen up to her.

"It is a confession of guilt," she exclaimed. "With my name to that paper and the whole thing in your hands, no power under the sun could keep me from prison."

"Do you think so? ha, ha!" laughed the detective. "You are not mentioned in the entire document."

"But my name at the bottom would give it personality," persisted Irene.

"Yes. Sign it or not, just as you wish."

The genteel sleuth seemed to sink into a state of cool indifference.

"If I sign it, what?"

"There is the door, and you can walk out."

Irene's heart appeared to leap into her mouth. She would be free again! She could go back to Tully Trenck, or she could set Kit Kline, her convict husband, on the hunter's trail!

Surely, with a merciless man like Kit against him, he could not triumph long. The paper could be stolen and all his playing turned to naught.

Thoughts like these flashed through Irene's brain as she stood at the detective's desk.

"Can I read the paper?" she suddenly asked.

"Certainly."

The New York ferret pushed it toward her and she went through it in silence, covertly watched as she knew by the man who had written it.

"No," said Irene sarcastically as she looked up from the end of the last line. "You have not been harsh! A colder and more cruel document than that I never saw come from the hand of man. It binds me to eternal secrecy concerning your discoveries and my detention here to-night. I am not to mention the facts to Tully Trenck or Kit Kline. I am to come to the front when you want me, or I can go to Europe or elsewhere. No, the paper is not exacting—not at all!" and Irene laughed derisively again.

"But I sign," she went on, reaching for the pen. "I cannot help myself, and I am in your power."

The detective said nothing.

Compressing her lips so firmly that she robbed them of all color, she leaned forward and wrote her name in a steady hand at the foot of the paper.

"You are satisfied now, I trust," remarked the woman throwing down the pen and rising erect. "Now, open the door."

"With pleasure," answered the detective, and stepping across the room he held the door open and said "good-night" to Irene as she passed out.

The woman's brain seemed on fire as she went down the stair cast in gloom here and there.

Her hands were clinched till the nails appeared to sink into the palms, and her lip had been bitten through.

"It is the sleuth's hour of triumph," she cried. "Let him enjoy it while he may. My hour will come before long—then, by the heavens that hang over me to-night! he will discover that a woman can destroy. He holds against me a paper which, if used, would send me to a living hell, but it will never be used! There is a fatal slip between the cup and the sleuth-hound's lip. He has Irene Nims to deal with. His hour of triumph is already on the wane, and I am bafely out of his clutches!"

Irene on the streets of Gotham was not the Irene who had been beaten by the cool detective in the little up-stairs office.

She looked like another woman, and as she

glided along, as if afraid to trust herself again to the lights of another street car, she might have been taken for a specter in black.

More than an hour later she entered the Musgrave Mansion.

There was a dim light in the library, and she did not invade it.

She was passing up-stairs to her room when a hand touched her arm, and she turned with a slight cry which was quickly suppressed by the face she saw.

"In God's name, what brought you here?" gasped Irene, for the features she saw in the dim light of the hall were not those of Tully Trenck, but Kit Kline's.

"You broke your engagement. You have forced me to come here," was the answer.

"Does he know you are in the house?"

"Of course not. Come into the library."

Irene drew back.

"If he should find us there—"

"He will not. Let that settle it," interrupted the convict. "You have been out yet you failed to keep your appointment."

"I could not," answered the woman who by this time had passed into the library with the fingers of her convict husband encircling her wrist like a manacle.

"You could not, eh?" fiercely grinned Kit in reply. "Why not?"

Irene leaned toward him and lowered her voice.

"I have been bound with an oath since I saw you," replied she.

"Hah! I thought something of the kind was up. The man up-stairs is determined to beat those who helped him to the fortune, and you have been foolish enough to let him mesh you, Irene."

"He has made me take no oath."

"But you said—"

"I did not mean Tully Trenck," broke in Irene. "I fell into the hands of quite another person down-town."

The look she got from the man of six prisons never passed from her mind.

"Then you have seen the sleuth of Broadway!" hissed he.

"Yes," retorted Irene. "I have seen the man whom I supposed to be out of the way forever—the human Nemesis who you told me would never scent another victim. How is this?"

"Never mind!" and Kit spoke through his teeth. "The best trap fails to hold the rat sometimes, but because it fails once we must not think that it will always fail to keep him. You have seen *this man*, you say. Where?"

"In his office."

"Ah! he caught you, then?"

Irene said "yes" in a whisper scarcely audible.

"What happened?"

The woman did not speak for a moment.

"I have told you that I am oath-bound," she replied at length.

"What is that to you in a game of life and death of this sort?" cried the convict. "Are you going to hold sacred an oath forced from you by the man who will crush you some day with a laugh for your submission? Are you the woman I made my—"

"Hush!" and Irene paled as she caught the convict's arm. "The very walls of houses have ears."

"But not the walls of this one to-night!" laughed Kit. "You took an oath a while ago, eh?"

"I did."

"Of what nature?"

"I signed a paper."

"Ho!" ejaculated the convict.

"I want that document!" exclaimed Irene, her grip tightening suddenly on his arm. "I want it to-night. It is in his office. It was forced from me—the confession was. The oath was at the end of the paper, where I put my name to get away from him—to find you and put you on the trail."

A smile came to the convict's lips.

"Then you did not intend to keep the oath?"

"No!—not longer than I could see you," was the answer. "The crisis of the game is here. Philip Fox holds in his hands more than one thread of the skein."

"But he don't hold them long!" came from the convict's tongue. "He played his last hand awhile ago. I came here to see you on another matter, Irene; but let it go for the present. The man up-stairs plays bluff to his eternal ruin. He thinks he can say 'no' and speak a threat and see Diamond Dunn, your husband, fly from Gotham between two days. Don't disabuse his mind of this idea. To-morrow night come to the old house at ten. You will not be detained by the sleuth the next time. Remember!—at ten!"

Irene heard the door shut softly, and as she crept up the carpeted stair, making no noise, she said to herself:

"I have turned the fatal tables on the best sleuth in America. Phil Fox wins nothing!"

CHAPTER XXXII.

SAM FINDS HIS MAN.

THIS was easy for Irene to say as the excite-

ment of the moment made her blood sweep hot through her veins.

The thought added a new glow to her cheek and a brighter luster to her eyes, and she forgot for the time that she was a felon's wife.

"He won't let grass grow under his feet in this matter," she continued in her room. "He will strike at once, and the detective will find himself robbed by morning if no worse."

She dropped to sleep to dream of a masked enemy in a little room down-town; she saw the stealthy hand that took from a desk a paper to which her name was attached, and then she clutched it in her own hands!

The climax of the dream awoke Irene and she was chagrined to find herself in her own little chamber with nothing at all in her grip.

"Never mind; I will have it there by and by," she muttered. "Then Phil Fox, sleuth as you are, you will know better than to trust a woman."

Of course Irene lost sight of Kit Kline the moment the door was closed on his figure.

She could imagine, but she could not see.

Therefore she did not follow the Italian's late customer down into that quarter of the city where the detective's office was.

Kit was already on the hunt.

He stopped in a certain house before he was half way down to Phil Fox's quarters, but he soon came out again.

A faint light was burning in the shadow's office, but the man himself was not in.

Kit who had been there on several former occasions opened the door by means of a bit of pliable steel which he took from his pocket, and locked it again after entering.

Then began a systematic search for the confession Irene had signed.

His nimble fingers felt everywhere; his keen eyes let nothing escape them.

"Irene said it was here," growled the convict. "That is, it was when she came away. No doubt of that, for the detective himself let her out. I've gone over the whole territory; I've looked everywhere. No, not behind this picture. This will complete the job."

The felon as he finished moved a picture from the wall and felt behind it with his silken hand.

"Nothing there," said Kit.

Nothing!

If he had taken the picture down and let the light shine on the spot he would have been convinced that something was there.

He did not know that he had moved his hand over his own name written in the blood of and by his last gasping victim!

If he could have seen behind the picture he might have doubted the old Italian's prophecy—that his game was to be crowned with success.

Kit turned moodily from the scene of his labors; but suddenly his face brightened.

"I find the paper when I find him!—that is it," he exclaimed. "The dog on the trail carries the written oath with him. Yes, I find them both at once." And off he went down-stairs to the street, taking care to leave everything in the office as he had found it.

Did he know where to look for the Broadway spotter?

If he did not, why did he go almost straight to Mag Manacle's establishment?

He knew that he was forbidden there, and he had not forgotten his exit—thrown through the doorway from the hands of the glantess herself.

"He knows where I have been," thought Kit, his mind going back to the detective. "He knows that Barry and I have counseled there, that Muggles alias Tully Trenck has been with us in the private room. This dangerous sleuth who got out of the trap Heaven knows how and who has already in his hands links enough to make a complete chain must be killed. I make no bones about it now. The dog first, the bluffer next."

The man of six prisons, cool as he was, was not the person to take chances in Mag's den in his own plumage.

He was going there a crow in a raven's coat, for between the detective's office and the criminal's paradise, he had stopped long enough to effect a change of costume.

Kit the convict crossed the threshold with all the confidence in the world in his disguise.

He looked very unlike his old self, and he was satisfied that the keenest sleuth on earth would not know him as he was.

He struck the establishment at the hour when business was at its flood tide.

This was always between eleven o'clock and midnight. The room was then always full, and Mag was busy carrying out the boisterous wishes of her guests.

Kit surveyed the room as he entered and was about to conclude that there was no chair left for him when two men left a table in one corner and made a vacancy.

It was just the luck he wanted, so he edged along the wall and took one of the seats.

"Pretty well filled up to-night!" he remarked in a change of voice to Mag as she stood beside the table to take his order.

"Yes. I'm always this way, you know, 'bout this hour," was the reply without the slightest sign that she knew her guest.

Kit then called for a bottle of wine and a cigar, and let a smile creep over his face as he watched the Amazon glide away to fill the order.

"Mebbe she'd change her tune if she knew that the man who was never to come here again was on deck," he chuckled. "Before long I'll pay back the debt contracted at Joliet, for I'll soon be in a situation to settle with her in full. After that mebbe I won't feel her fingers at my waist. Gods! if they hadn't pulled her off when they did I wouldn't be here head over ears in the deepest game I've ever played."

While Mag was gone Kit took a keen survey of the occupants of the room. It was the usual crowd as far as he could see, but he did not let one escape without a minute inspection.

"I can't see him here like a tiger waiting for his prey," muttered the convict. "If he is under the ceiling, he wears a mask, that fools me. I guess I've peeped into the wrong hole to find him; but—"

He was cut short by the reappearance of the proprietress of the place.

Their eyes met before Mag had crossed the floor.

"I think she's dropped onto me," passed through Kit's mind. "If she has she's got too much sense to make a scene here in her own trap."

The next moment the Amazonian figure of Mag Manacle stopped at the table and a bottle, a glass and a cigar slipped from her tray and arranged themselves before the customer.

"Drink your wine, but don't take time to finish the cigar," said the woman leaning forward and speaking in low tones as her hand covered the coin which Kit threw down in payment. "I gave you your orders once, and I don't want to repeat them."

In an instant a diabolical light shone forth from the felon's eyes.

"Don't answer me," continued Mag. "Drink your wine and go."

Under almost any other circumstances Kit Kline would have resented these words, but he was not in the proper place to show his hand.

Smothering his rage, which he did at the expense of temper, he looked once at Mag, and turned to his wine.

The woman walked away.

"Trip or hoodwink that tiger-cat if you can," laughed Kit. "I would have bet my head that she did not know me when she went off with the order, but now she reads me like a book. Wait, my vixen. Give me time to moisten my throat, and I'll delight you with my absence. My prey isn't here anyhow, so there's nothing to keep me."

Kit did not seem to find the wine to his taste, for after emptying one glass of it, he picked up the cigar, and began to edge along the wall again.

All at once his eye fell upon a man he had not seen till then.

"The silent hound, eh?" came up in his throat. "The doctors had to discharge him half-cured. If he could get his head and tongue to working again he might make it interesting for some people. But, as he is, he is dangerous enough to require a little watching, especially since I find him in a place of this sort."

The person thus suddenly seen by the convict was Sam Sharpe, or Sam the Silent, as he had been dubbed by the reporters—a name which promised to stick to him through life.

The detective's spy, whom we saw last rushing from the surgeon's private room in the hospital, had come to Mag Manacle's for a purpose which a man like Kit Kline should have guessed.

He did not appear to be taking the slightest notice of the person edging along the wall toward the street.

Kit gave him several scrutinizing looks before he left him unobserved.

"Some other time I'll give you my compliments, that is, if you insist on throwing yourself across my path," growled the convict, leaving Sam to himself. "Just now, as you seem to be oblivious of my presence here, I'll not cultivate your acquaintance."

He reached the door by this time, and passed out, followed by Mag Manacle's look of mingled contempt and satisfaction.

"He curses everything he touches," murmured the woman. "I don't forget that he brought up my past in a taunting manner—a past I could not help. He must not come here. The next time I will break my rule—I'll betray somebody."

Confident that Phil Fox was not in the room on the lookout for him, Kit Kline reached the sidewalk once more.

There he stopped and seemed to reflect.

"No man, no papers!" he muttered. "I ought to get one of the others before morning. I can't play my game against Tully Trenck if I don't silence this man-ferret. I know where the girl is—but hang the girl! She is nothing. I could give her half and then come out rich. What I want first is the silence of the man who never drops a trail."

He started off suddenly as he uttered the last word.

If he had looked behind him then he might have seen the figure whose strides were great noiseless bounds.

He knew he had an enemy at his back when he actually found him there.

The touch of hands on his clothes was enough to make the convict wheel as if an electric battery had touched him.

The next instant he was pushed against the nearest building, and as his hands were forced together with a suddenness which he could not resist, something clicked at his wrists!

All this did not occupy the half of a second, and when the astonished felon recovered enough to catch a new breath and to look forward, he saw before him the pair of eyes which he had just left, above one of Mag Manacle's wine tables.

He did not have to ask any questions.

He knew that Sam the Silent had found his man.

CHAPTER XXXIII.

STEEL AGAINST STEEL.

Kit the convict knew what it meant to be caught by the man who held him against the house and whose quick fingers had fastened his hands with a pair of manacles famous the city over.

"What do you want of me?" growled Kit. "Have you no other employment than to watch for honest people and when they come along pounce upon them like a tiger? Do you know whom you have caught?"

To this there was of course no answer more than the flashes of the eyes into which the convict looked, and Kit in truth needed no other.

He was aware that Sam the Silent knew exactly whom he had caught, and no words of Kit's were likely to make him relinquish his prey.

"I'm into it for trouble if he gets me where he evidently wants me," thought the felon. "I wonder if his memory has come back sufficiently to let him pick up the lost links. If not why has he nabbed me? By heavens! I must shake this man off or lose the big play against his master."

Kit summoned all the strength he possessed to a desperate purpose.

More than once he had escaped from prisons and prison-keepers, but it was by strategy rather than strength. However he could use strength when necessary.

All at once he dashed straight at the man who held him in a grip that vied with the cold clutch of the manacles.

Sam was thrown half-way across the pavement by the shock, but he managed to keep his hold in part.

Kit threw up his manacled hands as the silent spy tried to recover. They stopped above his head for a breathless instant and then came down with all the driving power he could command.

Sam saw the movement before it could be completed; he sought to break the force of the blow by throwing up one of his hands, but it was beaten down as though it were a wisp of straw.

The manacle struck the spotter spy's face, a stunning blow.

It broke Sam's grip and sent him headlong toward the gutter.

The convict did not wait to see him strike as he knew he would. There was danger of somebody arriving upon the scene, a policeman might come though few ever showed themselves in the vicinity of Mag's place—he dared not remain another second.

Kit Kline ran away at the top of his speed and darted down the first alley that offered an asylum.

What had become of Sam he did not know; he only hoped that the fall had finished the work of the blow in the face.

The man of six prisons came out on the other street. As he stepped from the darkness of the alley he caught a gleam that startled him.

He still wore the manacles!

"I've got these yet," he said to himself, with a ferocious grin. "I'm devilish lucky that the hand of that silent spy isn't still at my throat. When I get his keepsakes off, I'll feel better."

Kit kept in the shadows of the buildings as much as possible and carried his hands so as to conceal the handcuffs.

He growled more than once to himself as he hurried along, and when he stopped in front of a house that stood behind some pavement trees he rapped with eagerness.

"I've got a key, but I can't use it for these infamous bracelets," he observed. "If Barry doesn't happen to be in, I presume I've got to hide till he comes. But no! the pard is here."

Kit heard a shuffling of feet beyond the door and then he gave three peculiar raps once more.

A key turned in the lock and the door opened. Kit glided in, passing a man who greeted him with an exclamation of surprise.

"Where's your key?" asked the porter.

"In my pocket," grinned Kit.

"In your pocket, eh, and you didn't use it?"

By this time the two men had passed into a

room where a gas-jet revealed them to each other.

"This is why I didn't use the key," continued the convict, holding up his hands, at sight of which Black Barry fell back, and his startled gaze became a stare.

"In fortune's name, where did you get the bracelets?" cried Barry. "You don't pick such fine ones up every day, and, by Jupiter! they're the ones Phil Fox invented."

"They are, eh? I guess that's how I come to have them on," was the reply.

"Did he give them to you?"

"No, his man did."

"Sam the Silent?"

"Sam."

As Kit finished, he dropped into a chair and stretched his imprisoned arms across the table.

"I want 'em off," he cried, looking at his companion. "The work I've got on hand would be impeded with these beauties at my wrist. I got 'em from the man who they say has lost his memory. It doesn't look like it, eh, Barry?"

"Right you are," answered the convict's pal. "They say there's but one key that unlocks these bracelets, and Phil Fox carries that."

"Hang the key! We don't keep a house without files. Take 'em off! While you work, I'll tell you all about how they got where they are."

Black Barry looked again at the shining manacles, and then crossed the room to a small cupboard set in the wall, and so nearly like the wall itself as to be almost invisible.

Kit looked up from his handcuffs long enough to see his partner take from the place several small files and one or two delicate steel saws.

"Now go to work, Barry. You've got the proper tools there, and we've got a good half of the night before us."

The convict's pal drew a chair alongside and selected one of the saw-blades, which he fastened in a handle.

While he attacked the steel, Kit began to relate his adventures, and his words were soon mingling with the slight noise of the saw.

Suddenly Barry stopped working, and looked up.

"What if you killed the man?" he asked.

"Then I've rectified the blunder made some time ago," was the answer.

"But you'll have more than the Broadway spotter at your heels. The police—"

"To Tartarus with the police! I've played with them all my life. It is the secret hounds that I fear—those men who are picking up trails when you don't think of them."

"Like Sam the Silent?"

"Like that man!"

"If you have killed him, as I was saying, Phil Fox will naturally throw the deed on your shoulders."

"They're broad!" laughed Kit, shrugging his shoulders at the same time. "But I won't give the Broadway sleuth breathing time," he went on. "I was looking for him when I met Sam. I thought I would find him at Mag's looking for us; but I found the other one there."

Black Barry went back to the steel bracelets again, and Kit was permitted to continue his narrative to the close.

It was a strange scene that the light revealed in that circumscribed apartment.

When Kit had finished his story, he watched Barry some time in silence.

The saw was doing its work surely and steadily, and at length, as it sunk through the steel and Barry stopped with an ejaculation of victory, the convict gave utterance to a cry of joy.

"The tiger is no longer chained!" he exclaimed. "Now let 'em all look out."

"All?" echoed Barry.

"Yes, all—Phil Fox and his spy, and Tully Trenck and his man."

"Who is his man?"

"Why, Baldimore Bryce, the so-called independent detective, who is helping him to keep his grip on the million we're all playing for! I don't fear that sleuth, though. He has neither the grit nor the honesty of the other one. We'll keep these bracelets for mementoes, Barry. When we get rich we'll have 'em gilded and hung up in the boss establishment we'll keep. Get out the paper, now. I want to see the grip we've got on the man in the gold coffin."

Barry Black went to the wall and found a secret button there, which he pressed.

In an instant a little door slid open, and the crook thrust his hand into the opening thus displayed.

"Fetch it here," resumed Kit, and then his eyes became riveted on his companion. "What are you feeling for?"

"There's nothing here!" answered the convict's pard, showing him a surprised face.

"Nothing there? The—deuce!"

Kit Kline cleared the space between table and wall like an acrobat fired from a circus cannon. He pushed Barry aside and ran his hand into the secret niche.

It was empty sure enough.

For a moment the convict seemed stunned by the awful revelation.

"It—was—there!" he gasped, whirling upon Barry. "I had it in my hands only a short

time ago. Great Caesar's ghost! What has become of it?"

"You'll have to ask some one else," replied Black Barry. "I always thought it was a poor place to keep the documents—"

"Where was a better?" broke in Kit, and his look was positively ferocious. "You said yourself, when we put it there, that the keenest eye in New York could not find the button, much less detect the slide without it. Now, sir, the weapon we were going to hold over Tully Trenck's head is gone. It was to have won us more money than you or I ever saw." And the man of six prisons glared at the empty hole in the wall as though he could have torn it larger with his hands.

"How long have you been here?" he continued.

"About two hours."

Kit seemed to reflect a moment.

"Then," said he, "then there was an interval of about the same time between my departure and your arrival. During that time the theft was committed."

"The Broadway sleuth may have struck the trail unexpectedly," observed Barry. "If he did not find it—"

Black Barry was checked by the peculiar attention he was receiving from his companion.

"Go on. I want to hear your opinion," smiled Kit.

"You will pardon me for it," and Barry's hand dropped on the convict's arm with the softness of a kid glove. "But I was going to say that if Phil Fox did not find the paper, Tully Trenck's money did."

A laugh rippled over Kit's lips, but his eyes showed none of its merriment.

"Ha! do you think so?" he exclaimed. "I recollect now that she was out to-night, and yet she wasn't here while I waited for her. She said she fell into the hands of the Broadway spotter."

"Your wife is a cool one," replied Black Barry. "You must not forget her beautiful past. She's not beyond the influence of the almighty dollar, and Tully Trenck has a hold on her as firm as the one you think you enjoy. If I were going to ask any person what became of the contents of your hole. I'd ask Irene!"

The convict's teeth clinched, and Black Barry heard them crack.

CHAPTER XXXIV.

THE FINAL CHASE.

"WELL, what did you find out last night? Your look tells me that you made a discovery of some kind after I went away; but you did not score the success you thought you would."

It was the forenoon of the next day and these words came from Leon Larimore the young secretary after he had entered a plain room occupied by Sam Sharpe.

There was a queer expression on the face of the detective's spy—an expression hard to read, but Leon had interpreted it to mean both success and failure.

Before he answered Sam took a hat from the table at his elbow and tossed it to the young man who caught it as a look of wonder illuminated his eyes.

There was a cut in the soft thick crown of the hat. It did not look like it had been done with a sharp instrument like a knife, and Leon unable to solve the mystery looked up at the silent man who was regarding him with a quiet smile.

"I presume this gash is one of the souvenirs of your last night's experience," exclaimed the secretary.

Sam nodded and out came the inevitable slate and pencil.

"You are right," wrote the spy. "One of my own manacles did the work."

Leon gave utterance to an exclamation of surprise.

"I found my man last night," continued Sam. "I put the bracelets on him in good style, but, strange to say, he would not submit, ha, ha!"

"Your man?" cried Leon. "I don't understand you. Do you mean that your memory has come back—"

"I have it once more," interrupted the spy's pencil. "What is more, I found the man last night, but when he brought his manacled hands down on my head with all the power he could command, I had to let him go. My thick hat saved my life, though it is cut through. I fell into the gutter and was picked up unconscious; but to-day I am myself again, ready to try it over."

"Whom did you nab?" asked Leon eagerly.

"Kit Kline," wrote the pencil.

"I might have guessed that, for all along I have associated that rascal with your misfortune. He got away from you?"

Sam nodded.

"With the handcuffs on?"

Another nod of assent.

"They were locked I presume?"

"They locked themselves," Sam Sharpe wrote. "You must not think, Leon, that Kit the felon has to carry the manacles the rest of his natural life just because I presented him with a pair of my own invention. Black Barry knows a good

steel saw when he sees one, and ere this Kit's hands are free."

"Of course," remarked Leon. "A man like Diamond Dunn isn't going to run round New York with wrists in coils of steel. He will get rid of them as soon as possible, and no sooner will they be off than his hands will want to clutch your throat."

The smile which had fled from Sam's face came back and broadened while Leon talked.

"I made another discovery last night—one that will interest you," resumed the silent spy with his pencil that fairly flew back and forth across the surface of the slate.

"You found the trail to Aida?" exclaimed the young man.

Sam's eyes answered before his tongue articulated a single word.

"I found the girl herself," he scrawled.

Leon leaned forward and clutched his arm as his eyes filled with eagerness.

"What! found Aida? Thank fortune! Sam, you're worth your weight in gold! Tell me where she is?"

"You will rush there and disarrange the game."

"I will obey you," pleaded Leon. "Without Aida the 'hand' we hold would not be worth playing. You know that the money for which Tully Trenck has plotted belongs to her—every dollar of it—that Monckton Musgrave who wronged her mother left it to her, hoping to repair his villainous conduct with his last breath. All his money could not undo his deeds, but it would lift Aida to affluence and there would be no more toil with the needle for her. You see how essential it is that we should find Aida Armstrong. Now that you have found her we have another important link in the chain."

"Aida is in no immediate danger though closely confined," replied the detective's spy. "She is at 906 N—street."

Leon fell back suddenly and looked straight into Sam's face.

"Why, that is the number occupied by Tully Trenck under the mask of Riley Dwyer!" cried he. "I once tracked Irene to the house."

"No doubt of it," assented Sam. "Aida has been a prisoner in that house ever since the head rascal of the plot decoyed her from her own humble quarters where she worked on the machine. What his final designs are no one knows; but certain it is that Aida came into possession of her rights."

"Never! The man who has already committed or had committed for him the blackest of all crimes is not going to be over nice to hold his own. Now, if we could but find Captain Phil. The man you manacled last night knows where he is."

A sudden light shone from Sam Sharpe's eyes as he leaned toward Leon.

"What? I believe you know something about Phil?" cried the young secretary.

Sam glanced at the slate lying to his hand.

"Tell me! What do you know?" Leon went on. "I don't want to believe that the trap which the gang sprung on the best of all detectives finished him. Phil Fox is a man of wonderful genius—a match for the shrewdest rogues that ever plotted. He swore to sift this crime against Aida's fortune to the bottom—to throw light on one of the dark secrets of city life. He believes that Monckton Musgrave would be living to-day but for the infamous scheming of one brain. I assume, you see, that the sleuth is not dead—"

Leon stopped to look at what Sam had just written.

"The brain and the hand of the captain are still at work!" he read.

Then he recoiled in his chair and stared at the sleuth's spy.

"How do you know this?" he cried.

"Ask me not," wrote Sam. "Be content to be told that this is."

"I will. From this hour I take new hope. From to-day I look forward to certain victory."

"There is many a slip," was the answer.

"Not for us!" exclaimed the confident Leon. "The slips are for those who have been playing so desperately for high stakes. But what are you going to do about the man who slipped through your hands last night?"

"Catch him, again!" sententiously wrote Sam's pencil.

"If he does not catch you," laughed Leon.

A serious look overspread Sam Sharpe's face. He pocketed the little slate quickly and left his chair.

Crossing the room, he took a bottle and two glasses from a cupboard, and came back with them.

"I see! Here's to our success," ejaculated Leon, touching his glass to Sam's, as the latter nodded approvingly. "With you and Phil Fox on the trail there can be no failure."

Again the eyes of the silent hunter snapped as if he liked the compliment, and when Leon turned to go he was followed to the door.

"I'll remember your injunction not to disturb Aida," said he, looking back at Sam. "I am going to believe that we will come out on top when the right time comes," and the following moment he was gone.

Sam Sharpe appeared to reflect for some time

after he had dismissed Leon, but all at once he picked up a hat which did not bear marks of an assault, and rushed out.

A strange force seemed to drive the sleuth's spy down-town.

He saw nothing nor nobody till he ran up a stair on Broadway, and burst into a room, where he found a man turning from a desk which he had just locked.

The eyes of the two men met.

"Hello!" cried the one whom Sam confronted, holding out his hand. "You've caught me at last, Sam, but not when I didn't want to be caught. I am out of the trap and once more on the trail; so are you. We need not exchange stories. I know how you have fared since I saw you last; you've left the hospital called 'cured.' You'll hear my story some other time."

Phil Fox—the man was the Genteel Spotter—waved Sam to a chair.

Instead of taking it, the spy threw a glance toward a picture hanging near the detective's desk.

A peculiar smile accompanied the look.

"What do you know?" asked the ferret.

Sam sprang forward and jerked the picture down; then stepping back, he pointed at the name on the wall.

"You've made a discovery, I see," laughed the detective.

Sam snatched a pencil from the table, and dashed a line across a sheet of paper lying there.

"I've got it all—all but my speech," he wrote.

"That is good," observed Phil Fox. "Now you know whom to look out for."

Sam's eyes seemed to sparkle.

"Sit down and listen to me three minutes without interrupting," continued the Broadway sleuth.

The silent spy dropped into a chair.

"The biggest play of the whole game is about to be made," resumed Phil Fox. "There is on foot to-night in New York a scheme, which, if carried out, will put crime on top. The man of six prisons will either be successful to-morrow or crushed. He has lost a paper, which was the weapon he intended to hold over Tully Trenck's head. That paper is the true will of Monckton Musgrave, the one stolen from Leon Larimore, and for some reason kept undestroyed by Irene Nims, after another was forged by Penwork, the accomplished forger in Trenck's pay. I say that this will, which till a short time ago was in Kit Kline's possession, is not there now. I have it."

Sam Sharpe gave the detective a quick look, which promised to be followed by an interruption, but Phil cut it off by a shake of the head.

"Kit Kline and his pard, Black Barry, occupy No. 1001 Z—street," continued he. "They have two schemes in their heads now: one is to silence Philip Fox swiftly and forever, the other is to bleed Tully Trenck if they can, but failing in that, to rob him of all his evil wealth. I want you to go to work now. You are to find those two men as soon as possible. You must not lose sight of them for one minute. I have other work to do. The principal witness—the one who can condemn all the infamous villains, must be secured—put out of the reach of their knives. I mean Irene Nims—I call her by her old name, you see. Kit Kline has ceased to trust his wife. He believes that she stole back the will which she placed in his hands, and the wretch will seal her lips forever, if some one don't step in between. You know your work, Sam, and I say with pride that you have never failed me yet. I will take care of myself against the traps of the scoundrels. I have been in one during the game, and that is enough. The fight is nearly to the finish, but the greatest danger is at hand. I have dealt with many cool heads in my time, but this prison-bird beats them all."

Several minutes later Phil Fox, the sleuth, left his office in disguise, but one of two men caught the other's arm and whispered:

"The dog on the trail, Barry. We must not fail the next time."

And the man addressed answered with an oath:

"We will not!"

CHAPTER XXXV.

SETTING THE TRAP.

TULLY TRENCK who slept so soundly after his exciting interview with Kit Kline in the library that he knew nothing of the presence of the chief villain in the house when Irene came home, resolved to put the convict out of the way.

He saw that a gigantic game of blackmail was about to be played and that he was to be the victim.

Perhaps he thought that the hold the two villains had on him was a dangerous one, for notwithstanding his boast that the word of neither would weigh against his, he knew that it would not be good policy to invite the contest.

As yet he had not found out that Phil Fox the detective, the man to be feared most, had escaped from the trap which was intended for his tomb.

Irene could have imparted this knowledge,

but she did not see fit to do so, and, therefore, when Mr. Tully Trenck went down-town with a certain plan matured in his head she watched him from the window with a curious smile.

"Threatens me does he?" remarked the plotter to himself while the car whisked him toward his destination. "He thinks I dare not show a hand against him because of the secret he holds. I'd like to know who'd believe that I hired two criminals to steal a will on the street in broad daylight. Besides the moment Kit Kline plays a card all I have to do is to say: 'that man is Diamond Dunn,' and the hand of Justice thwarts him. But," here Mr. Trenck reflected a moment, "but I can't afford to let it go this far. I must take events by the forelock. I must render this brace of villains harmless."

It was about the time of Leon's call on Sam Sharpe in the spy's lodgings when the new nabob entered a small office-like room on one of the smaller streets that debouch into Broadway near Wall.

He was welcomed cordially by Baldimore Bryce the independent detective who has figured more or less in these pages. The so-called sleuth seemed surprised by Tully Trenck's visit at that hour, but the man's manner indicated that something unusual was on hand.

"How goes it now?" asked Bryce a keen looking man of forty-five with a crop of chestnut colored whiskers.

"That is what I've come for," was the reply.

"Ah! I trust you have not been plundered of some of your wealth."

"Not yet, but the wolves are at the door," remarked Trenck.

"Turn on them," advised the detective promptly.

"That is just what I want to do, with your aid."

Baldimore Bryce smiled and dropped his head: "I'm at your service," answered he.

"Do you know," resumed Tully Trenck, moving his chair nearer the man whom he addressed, "that there is a standing reward of two thousand dollars for an escaped prisoner named Diamond Dunn?"

"I think you are right, sir; but we will see in a moment."

The independent detective took from a desk at his elbow a book in which were pasted newspaper clippings and rewards of money for the arrest of certain criminals, and the like.

"Here it is!" exclaimed Bryce, after turning several leaves. "Two thousand dollars for the arrest and return to the prison at Joliet, Illinois, of Diamond Dunn."

"That is it," observed Tully Trenck. "I thought I was right."

"There is another standing offer for the same man. It is not so large if I recollect rightly, but a man could not afford to let it go by if he knew where the sleek fellow was."

"What would you do if you knew, Mr. Bryce?"

The free lance detective looked at the speaker as if he did not fully understand him.

"I—I think I should take in the larger reward," he replied.

"Promptly?"

"Yes, sir. That is the way I always act."

Tully Trenck seemed to let out a breath of mingled satisfaction and relief.

"Then I am here to add two thousand dollars to your wealth," said he. "I happen to know that the very man described in the hand-bill from which you have just read is within reach of your hand."

"Diamond Dunn do you mean?"

"Diamond Dunn!" answered Trenck, with a positiveness that carried weight with it. "I have discovered by what means I need not relate here that this notorious character who is wanted at at least three prominent prisons of the country is within easy reach and I believe that a shrewd man-catcher like yourself, Mr. Bryce, can take him and achieve a new and flattering success."

"It would be a pull sure enough," remarked the detective, whose eyes brightened as he spoke. "I shall catch a man thus wanted at the first opportunity."

"I thought you would," exclaimed Trenck. "I might have carried the information elsewhere—to Philip Fox for instance—but I know my friends, and that's why I'm here."

Baldimore Bryce thought that his customer had said quite enough by way of flattery and introduction.

"Where is this prison-bird?" he asked.

"When can you take him?"

"On sight."

"He couldn't be taken sooner, of course. He and a partner have a house at present on Z—street. The number is one thousand and one."

The detective seemed to make a mental note of the information.

"He has a partner has he?" he asked.

"A man commonly called Black Barry."

"Alias 'Gold' Barry and half a dozen other names."

"You know him?"

"Very well."

"Isn't Barry wanted somewhere, too?" and Tully Trenck glanced at the look of rewards and descriptions on the table.

"He generally serves his terms out like a gentleman," smiled Bryce.

"But don't you know enough against him to take him with Diamond Dunn?"

"There is nothing but suspicion of having been concerned in a bank burglary over in Jersey six months ago."

"Is the proof good enough to hold him?"

"I think it is; but you see Black Barry is under police surveillance which is why he has not been arrested before this."

"Oh, they're waiting for him to trip himself, eh?"

"Possibly."

"Well, my opinion is that they'll wait some time," observed Tully Trenck. "If you could catch him in company with the notorious Diamond Dunn it seems to me you would have a hold on him which would eventually send him up."

"It might," guardedly answered the independent detective. "Are you certain, Mr. Trenck, that the man you have been speaking about is the real Diamond Dunn?"

"I am," emphatically responded the plotter.

"What is his alias now?"

"I believe it is 'Kit Kline.'"

The detective was seen to make a slight start. "Does he make number 1001 his constant hiding place?" he asked.

"No, sir. I believe he goes sometimes to a place of some sort kept by a woman named or called Mag Manacle. I know nothing of it from actual observation, but I infer from what I've heard that it is a resort for spirits like the escaped jail-bird."

A man like Tully Trenck could say without blushing that he had never been to Mag Manacle's establishment. He did not have to inform Baldimore Bryce that he had been there more than once as Mr. Muggles to consult with the very rascals whom he was now seeking to silence by the operations of the law.

"I think I have given you enough information to enable you to catch one of the most notorious prison-birds in the country," he continued, to the detective.

"You have not described him," calmly responded Bryce.

"Haven't I? That is easily done, but you know he is not likely to be found in his true colors."

"I'll take him as Kit Kline."

Mr. Trenck then proceeded and gave the detective a striking picture of Kit the convict, and when he had finished, he felt like congratulating himself on his success as a word artist.

"No one ought to miss the bird after your description," remarked Bryce when Trenck had concluded.

"I am sure you will not," was the reply.

Baldimore Bryce leaned back in his chair and studied his client's face for a moment.

"You must know that a man of Diamond Dunn's character is desperate," he observed. "He has defied arrest several times, and the police of several cities, knowing of the reward offered for him, have let him run at large rather than attempt to run him in."

"I did not know that; but never mind, Mr. Bryce. If you don't think the reward offered for him tempting enough, permit me to add a thousand to it, with the understanding, of course, that I am not to appear in the matter."

"I understand," said the detective, an amused twinkle appearing in his eyes. "As a matter of course, you want Diamond Dunn sent back to his old quarters for the protection of society."

"Certainly. Such dangerous scoundrels should not be permitted to run at large. I have discovered that this infamous prison-bird is in New York, and I would be failing in my duties as a man if I kept the information to myself. He has some years yet to serve, I believe?"

"Eight at Joliet, and three each at two other prisons."

"Fourteen years, anyway!" smiled Tully Trenck, well pleased with the thought, and picking up his hat. "I wish you success, Mr. Bryce. If you can take Black Barry as well, you will be doing justice a double service. I shall pay my share of the reward the moment the iron doors of Joliet close on Diamond Dunn, and while I am at it, I will pay five hundred dollars for the conviction of Black Barry for any crime."

The independent detective bowed his acknowledgment of the second liberal offer.

Several minutes later when Mr. Tully Trenck walked out of the little office he was watched like a hawk by the sleuth till he had vanished.

"Now, my cool rascals, you are powerless," ejaculated the plotting nabob. "You showed your hand a little too soon, Kit Kline, and before night you're likely to wish you had been content with what you got. I knew I would get you into toils of iron before I left the detective's office. When you look through the iron diamonds of your old cell you'll wish you had never heard of me. I know how to deal with troublesome people. I've dealt with them before, and always to their sorrow! With the two scoundrels in the hands of the law, I'm all right; the million is safe, and the coast will remain clear. I don't care a snap for the man who has come

away from the hospital with a blank mind, and the girl Aida will not be hard to handle."

Tully Trenck was in a good frame of mind while he walked up town.

"I must be sure to pick up the afternoon papers. Bryce is fond of notoriety, and his catch will be in the evening dailies in fine style. I'd like to know who ever played a more successful game than mine! No one has seen my hand in it at any time, and I have carried out all my plans."

Thus the man talked to himself at intervals between the detective's office and his house.

When he entered he was met by Irene, who looked undisturbed as she said:

"There's a note in the library for you, sir."

"A note, Irene!" echoed he. "Who brought it?"

"A well-dressed boy, sir."

Wondering what could be the contents of the unexpected message, Tully Trenck went to the library and spied it on his desk.

Picking it up he glanced for a moment at the superscription and then tore it open.

"MR. TULLY TRENCK," he read unconsciously aloud, "you want to be careful what you do. Phil Fox, the Man of Broadway, is alive and on the trail. He has taken an oath to go to the end of the thing. Be vigilant. Guard yourself well. Good by."

"BARRY."

At the end of the message Tully Trenck uttered a strange cry.

"What! the sleuth still alive?" he cried. "Then they have lied to me!"

At that moment he heard a footstep behind him, but when he turned he saw no one.

CHAPTER XXXVI.

THE JAIL-BIRD'S CLUTCHES.

ONE might almost say that Tully Trenck felt that the victory was his till he read the message which bore Black Barry's signature.

He had not believed that Kit Kline's pard would send him such a warning note, and he began to regret that he had included Barry in the sweep Baltimore Bryce was expected to make.

It was too late to go back down-town and countermand that part of the business relating to Barry, for the independent detective had doubtless opened the hunt already.

"I don't see how the Broadway ferret came to life," mused Mr. Trenck. "I was assured that he was off the trail, and I paid my money accordingly, but here I am informed that he is still in the game, and that he has sworn to go to the end of it. Is this a scheme hatched by the pair to bleed me again? Am I to be roped into hiring them over? I think I won't be hoodwinked the second time. Kit Kline is not the man to let Phil Fox run at large. I guess they fixed the sleuth when they said they did. This little scheme won't work, and I won't let up on the little game I started awhile ago."

Tully Trenck folded the message and put it away. He was not conscious of the fact that he had read it aloud nor that it had been heard by Irene.

There was a strange look in the woman's eyes when she glided to her room.

"So," she exclaimed, "so the human sleuth is still on the scent. What has Kit been doing all this time? He promised to find the confession I signed in the detective's office, and I had a right to believe from his language that he could go further than that, even to the silencing of the Broadway spotter. I want to know why he has not kept his word. With the confession in Phil Fox's hands I am forever ruined."

She left the house so quietly that she did not disturb the man in the library.

As she looked in through the half-open door and then passed on, she did not suspect that she had seen Tully Trenck for the last time.

Irene had to look after her own interests now.

Of late she had served two masters, and had become hopelessly entangled in the meshes of rival nets.

She knew that the darkest secret of her life was shared by the New York detective, and, as a matter of course, she wanted the man out of the way.

She wished she had gone to Europe on the Scotia; she wished herself anywhere but where she was.

Irene passed down-town till she struck Z—street quiet enough for that time of day.

This time there was no keen-eyed man on the platform of the car to nab her when she alighted. She was careful to look about, and to eye particularly the people on the street when she got off.

Irene had at all hours the *entree* to No. 1001 Z—street. There was another house besides this which she could enter and quit when she pleased, but on this occasion she preferred No. 1001 to the place where walls inclosed the sewing-girl and heiress of Gotham.

It was past the hour when she had agreed to meet her convict husband, but she hoped to find him at the house for all that.

Nobody met her at the door when she entered, and she turned the key in the lock and went on.

Irene thought she heard a slight noise in the room to the right of the hall and when she

opened the door and walked in she discovered that it had a tenant.

Kit Kline was there alone like a spider in his web waiting for the fly.

A smile of mingled satisfaction and victory crossed his hard face when he saw Irene, and when the woman took a chair half-way around the little table at which he sat, he leaned forward and looked at her closely.

"A little behind again," said he.

"Yes, I could not leave at the hour," answered Irene.

"He kept you, eh?" laughed Kit maliciously, and his cachinnation died away in a savage hiss. "Woman, don't you know that you can't serve two masters successfully?"

Irene lost color under the look she got.

"I don't serve two masters," she stammered. "I—I—"

"Let me talk," broke in the convict. "You seem to forget in your zeal to do his bidding that you are the lawful wife of the man who sits before you. You lose sight of the fact that the hand of Kit Kline could crush you while his could not harm you if it tried."

"You misjudge me—"

"Silence!" grated the man of six prisons. "I did not think you would come here after what has happened."

"What has happened?" asked Irene.

Kit threw a rapid glance toward the wall where the secret niche was. Irene's gaze followed him wondering.

"What has happened, eh? You ought to be the last woman in the world to ask such a question," he went on. "You know."

Irene thought of the message she had heard Tully Trenck read aloud.

Should she betray Black Barry to his partner in crime? Perhaps the letter had been written with Kit's consent. She thought of both these things.

Meantime the convict was eying her as though he would look her through.

Irene was in a quandary, and once more she wished herself on the Scotia, breasting the ocean and putting miles of watery space between her and the wolves and foxes of New York.

"What did he pay you for the new trick?" suddenly asked Kit Kline.

Irene started and fell back.

"The—new—trick?" she echoed. "I don't understand you."

The convict left his chair and stepped toward the nearest wall.

Throwing out his hand, he touched the secret button and the slide opened.

"You know now," he continued, turning to Irene. "You see that the place is empty. It is gone."

The woman sprung up with a startling cry.

"Gone?" she exclaimed.

"It isn't there, at any rate. It was gone last night when I wanted to see it. I say, Irene, what was the inducement, anyhow?"

"I understand you at last," replied Irene. "You accuse me of robbing the niche."

He looked at her with a cold, hard smile at his lips, but made no answer.

"You misjudge me again, I say," she went on. "I serve you better than I serve Tully Trenck. I—"

"It doesn't look like it," was the interruption. "You are, besides Barry and I, the only person who has the keys to this house. You know where I have kept the paper which was to make me worth more money than I ever saw. Don't tell me that you did not know. When you were to meet me here the other time you were elsewhere, and when I cornered you in Tully Trenck's house, you told me that Phil Fox had nabbed you and forced you to sign a compromising paper."

"Yes, yes; the paper! Did you find it?" cried Irene.

"I don't think it was there. A wild-geese chase!" laughed Kit, bitterly.

"But you did not go to see."

"Every nook of the office was searched," he responded. "I say, woman, you stick to the man who has the chink in preference to the one who wants it. A bird in the hand discounts two in the bush, I presume you think. Very well. Do you see that hole in the wall over yonder?"

Irene's gaze wandered to the robbed niche.

"That little place is going to give somebody a great deal of trouble," Kit cried. "It isn't such a sneak game after all. You showed your hand in the play beyond your expectations. You might as well have left your card on the table."

"I took nothing," suddenly exclaimed Irene flushing up, and meeting the convict's look with a boldness which he did not look for.

"That's a flat denial," he grinned. "You think that I can do nothing, that I think too much of my new wife to let her serve strange gods with impunity. Woman, you don't know the man you have married. But there is yet a door of escape. I have left it open for you. Fetch the paper back by ten o'clock to-night, restore it to yon niche—"

"I can't. I did not take it away and I don't know where it is."

"The old denial. By Jupiter! Irene, you

serve Tully Trenck with a loyalty that ought to have a medal."

Irene fell back from the face that came toward her as these words fell from the convict's tongue.

"Before heaven, I swear that I took nothing!" cried she. "I am in your power because I am your wife. You have given me a name I would not confess in public for all the gold in the ground. I am under Tully Trenck's roof because you have given me no better home. I am there as your spy. You know nothing that I have not discovered. I took the paper once and brought it to you. It compromised me—it made me out a traitress, yet, at your command I did it. Now I am accused of stealing it from you for him. Why, don't you know that by showing it to him I would incur his everlasting hatred? He still believes that it has no existence. When he gave it to me to be destroyed and I told him that I had reduced it to ashes he believed it. As I have just said such is his belief to-day. You must look for the thief elsewhere. I register a solemn oath on high that my hands have not touched the paper since I gave it to you. You must not go too far with me."

Irene seemed to know that she had finished with the wrong words almost before they were out of her mouth.

They carried with them a threat which she could ill-afford to breathe at that moment.

"Not too far, eh?" cried Kit Kline, and a moment more her wrist was in his clutch and she was jerked forward till their faces almost touched. "You mean that you will divulge a few things that would make matters unpleasant for me. Isn't that it, Irene! You know, perhaps, what Tully Trenck thought was a good card when I saw him last—that the gates of three prisons stand open for me. My little fool, you don't know the man you threaten! You swear that you took nothing from this room, you whose hands have been taking things half your life. Don't get pale when I rub the truth. I could throw you into the grip of the police, and you would not dare to call yourself Diamond Dunn's wife. Do you want to go back to the master who sits in the up-town mansion with his million at command? Tully Trenck called on a city sleuth a little while ago. Do you know what for, Irene?"

There was no answer—only the stony stare that filled the woman's eyes.

"He wants to set the secret trail dogs on our trail," Kit went on. "He wants the men who made him Croesus out of the way. Well, I don't blame him." And the convict showed his teeth.

"You can go back, Irene," he went on. "You can serve him to the end, but that won't be long. If you go down in the wreck of his fortunes don't blame me. Don't think that Phil Fox and his silent hound will trump the cards I hold. It can't be done! I've beaten fate and prison cells before!" And Irene was released so suddenly that she fell backward and dropped to the floor like one dead.

CHAPTER XXXVII.

THE LAST PROPOSAL.

ALL that day till night came, Tully Trenck occupied the big house alone.

He wondered several times what had become of Irene, and a visit to her room found the door locked.

"She must serve me faithfully," said he to himself when he went back to the library. "I have her in my fist and can crush her without endangering myself. I would like to know how Baltimore Bryce the detective got along with the commission I gave him. Something has happened to the schemers for neither has shown up with a blackmailing hand. I think I've euchered them, ha! ha! and they were the birds who expected to pick me clean."

Tully Trenck bought several afternoon papers and went through them with an eye on the outlook for something gratifying; but he was not rewarded.

"Hang it all! Bryce is not the man he's credited with being!" he exclaimed petulantly, throwing his cigar away. "He always hunts up a reporter when he makes an arrest, and gives the whole thing out. Does it take all day to take a man when his favorite haunts are known? Twenty-five hundred dollars ought to stimulate a man like Baltimore Bryce. By Jupiter! I don't intend to stand this shilly-shallying. I want the birds caged now—before they get a whack at me with beak and claw."

The greatest plotter in New York went out.

Night had come again, and the streets were lighted from end to end.

"On my way down I'll drop in and see the bird for myself," thought he. "Irene doesn't seem to play the right card there, and the right one must be played soon—the sooner the better, in fact."

A few minutes afterward, he dodged into a by-street and pulled up before a plain-looking house, at the door of which he knocked.

He was ushered into the hall by a large woman of almost Herculean figure, and with a face which told without asking, that money would tempt her to do most anything.

The door was locked behind Tully Trenck, and he asked as he looked at the portress:

"Has Irene been here to-day?"

The answer was a negative shake of the head, and the man held out his hand for a key which the woman was twirling on her fingers.

A minute more he had unlocked a door and was greeted by a light cry of genuine surprise.

The possessor of Musgrave's million shut the portal carefully, and looked at the tenant of the room.

It was Aida Armstrong, a little paler than when we saw her last struggling with Irene Nims for possession of a certain letter of warning: but she had lost none of her beauty.

"I have been waiting for you," she said, looking at Tully Trenck.

"I am glad to hear this," was the reply. "You don't seem to be contented here, and I presume you are eager to get away."

"Of course I am not contented; no one is in prison," observed Aida, coloring.

"Prison, eh?" grinned Trenck.

"What else is this house? Locks on all the doors, and I am watched by an Amazon wherever I move within its walls. I think the time has come for this to end, Riley Dwyer."

While the girl addressed him by the name under which he had decoyed her to the house, Tully Trenck knew that she had penetrated his disguise, and that he stood before her in his true light.

There was a tinge of sarcasm in Aida's pronunciation of the name.

"Well," said the villain, coolly, "there is a way out of here."

"Is it the one Irene has named?"

"Perhaps. When was Irene here last?"

"I haven't seen her for twenty-four hours."

Tully Trenck looked surprised.

"Wasn't she here to-day?" he asked, quickly.

"Not to-day."

She was to have come with another proposition," resumed the man, after a brief pause. "She was sent to you with a proposal which will give you all the liberty you want, and something besides."

Aida gave the speaker a steady look of a few moments.

"You know in the first place that I am not treated as I should be," said she. "You played your hand as Riley Dwyer, but I knew that you would win the game as Tully Trenck. Perhaps you have won it, for Irene has dropped certain words which left that impression. I would sooner be the tenant of my quarters, where I worked and was happy, than to be heiress to the largest fortune in this city, provided my heirship must be the rock on which honest lives are shipwrecked."

"You don't want money, then?"

"Not to the extent that I must plot and suffer for it."

"Wouldn't you take a few thousand and walk through your door a free woman?"

Aida did not speak for a moment.

"You do not understand me," he went on.

"Let me make the proposition Irene was empowered to make, but which she failed to do. You call me Tully Trenck—"

"Is that not your name?" asked Aida. "My mother used to speak of you as the man who helped Monckton Musgrave to blight her name and fame. Tully Trenck! Oh, yes; the name fell first on my ears a long time ago. My mother used to say that the day of reparation and retribution would come, but not while she lived. Musgrave made good the past as well as he could."

"How do you know this?"

"Never mind; I know!" replied the girl, a little mysteriously. "I know that one of the last acts of Monckton Musgrave's life was to give the child of the woman whose life he had blighted by slander nearly all he possessed in the world."

"But the will said nothing of this kind. The will was stolen on the street and afterward recovered by one of the shrewdest detectives of New York. Musgrave either forgot that he had ever wronged your mother, or else he believed he had not."

"You would heap abuse upon the name of the dead even now!" cried Aida. "It was the will as found that made you rich—that placed in your hands the Musgrave million. Dare you tell me, Tully Trenck, friend of my mother's enemy, that you profit by the bequests of the will that was lost?"

Despite his coolness the man of plots recoiled from the eyes that transfixed him like accusing arrows.

This was an unexpected shot and augured poorly for the success of his visit.

"Just as you think," remarked he shutting his lips almost savagely behind the last word.

"You don't want your liberty very badly, I see."

"I want to get beyond those eyes out yonder," answered Aida glancing toward the door.

"You don't like them, eh?"

"I do not."

"Then you don't have to be under their surveillance," smiled Tully Trenck. "Here is the last proposition. I will give you twenty-five thousand dollars, and open the door to-morrow for you if you agree to two things."

Aida's only reply was a look which he thought told him to go ahead.

"In the first place, you are to take an oath that you will never divulge to any one the source of your wealth, and secondly you are to quit New York and dwell somewhere a thousand miles beyond it."

A silence strange and deep fell after Tully Trenck's last sentence.

He tried to read the effect of his words on Aida's face, but to him it was as undecipherable as a hieroglyphic stone.

"So this is the proposition you sent by Irene?" asked the sewing-girl at last, her voice a little changed in tone inasmuch as it possessed a certain resolution which should have proclaimed the result.

"Yes, I sent it by Irene," answered Tully Trenck.

"Twenty-five thousand dollars for my acceptance of two propositions?"

"Twenty-five thousand in cash."

"My mother's money," came over the girl's lips.

"I draw the check and you cash it. I think that ought to settle it about the ownership of the funds."

"It settles nothing," Aida responded. "It only fixes in my mind the depths of the infamous plot of which I have been one of the victims. You can afford to make me the offer I have just heard. You want to seal my lips and remove me forever from the scene of your game. I accept nothing at your hands, Tully Trenck, but liberty fettered by no oath and no conditions."

The plotter drew back and looked at the girl amazed.

There was something in her mien which told that he had dealt with as resolute a person as he had ever encountered in his career of secret crime.

For a moment he flushed madly and his eyes got a tigerish gleam. Perhaps Aida saw his hands clench till they were tight. She knew she had enraged and baffled the man before her.

"Just as you wish," Tully Trenck remarked, a smile playing with his lips as he left the chair and looked down into her upturned face. "I make you no more offers. You have kept the eyes you say you don't like; you are quite apt to see them among the last things you ever see. You must not think, girl, that Tully Trenck is going to throw up any game Riley Dwyer may have played. I have offered to give you golden wings, but you have rejected them. Irene will come with no more propositions; the trail which leads to you is as hidden as the path that leads into the heart of the sea. You may sit here and think that the man whose spy you were—the human sleuth-hound of New York—will find you; but you will wait in vain. He finds nothing for—" he leaned toward Aida and dropped his voice to a whisper, "he has seen his last trail."

White grew the face of the young girl in the chair, and Tully Trenck's shrewd eyes saw a quiver shake her frame.

But it was over in a second.

"I believe nothing that falls from your lips!" she exclaimed. "You are no match for Phil Fox, the detective. What he has promised me to do he will accomplish. Your hired thugs may set traps and pitfalls for the man of the secret trail—your forgers may write wills to enrich you time after time, but the end will be destruction and the hand of the prince of sleuths will fall on top."

Tully Trenck met this prophecy with a laugh full of derision and mockery.

"I wish you a merry time of it here!" he resumed. "You will find the Amazon as you call her the faithful servitor of her employer, and when you wish—as you will—that you had jumped at the last proposition, it will be too late."

The hand of the speaker was on the knob, and while he finished he bowed to Aida and was gone before she could reply.

"I know what it all means!" cried the young girl. "But I am not going to perish here his victim. No! as vengeance came for my mother so it will come for me. He said he would run the game down, and he will. Phil Fox is to be the avenger of the living and of the dead!"

Then the hum of voices beyond the door died away, and Aida Armstrong, the prisoner of the plot, had silence for her companion.

CHAPTER XXXVIII.

CLOSING IN.

WHEN Tully Trenck left Aida he went directly to the building occupied by his detective, Baldimore Bryce.

He did not find that gentleman in, nor was he able to discover anything concerning his whereabouts.

He was not aware that he was watched by a man who regarded him with a good deal of interest.

"Mebbe he didn't believe what I sent 'im," muttered the watcher. "I wanted to do him a favor, for if Phil Fox picks up another link before Kit springs his trap, the game runs out. I don't believe in bleeding a man just because he can stand a little blood-letting. If we go slow Tully Trenck he'll come round all right, and we'll be richer after awhile than we are just now."

Need we mention now that the man who spoke thus as he followed the nabob like a hound was Black Barry, Kit Kline's partner?

He seemed to guess the purport of Trenck's visit to the independent detective's office, for he smiled when he saw him come away with a shadow of disappointment on his face.

Tully led his follower a good long chase, and fearing that it was never to end, the crook edged his way forward and touched him on the arm.

The plotter turned with a start and looked into Black Barry's face.

His presence there told him that Baldimore Bryce had not arrested the two villains, and he inwardly cursed the detective for his delay.

"What is it now?" asked Trenck, petulantly, as the man's fingers still rested on his sleeve.

"I would like to see you—a few moments: but not here."

"I've seen your partner."

"It is not that, sir," Barry hastened to say, and then he lowered his voice: "What I wrote you is true, every word of it. I want to talk about that, and something else."

The peculiar emphasis seemed to catch the schemer.

"Where shall we go?" he asked.

"I suggest to Mag's private room," was the reply. "You and I ain't forbidden the door."

"Who is?"

"Kit," grinned Barry. "Got thrown out for a bit of insolence."

"Then we won't have him intruding. We'll go to Mag's."

The two men turned and went down another street together.

In a few minutes they had entered Mag Manacle's famous establishment and were established in the secret room with a table and a bottle of wine between them.

"I want to say that I had no hand in Kit's last play," began Barry.

"No?"

"I don't do that kind o' business. You've paid me once and that's enough. But this detective who got out of the trap alive Heaven knows how is on the trail again. His spy who went to the hospital with two dagger wounds and more dead than alive is also at large, and wants vengeance."

"But he doesn't know where to strike," put in Trenck. "He lost his memory I am told—"

"Lost it? he! he!" laughed Barry over the table. "From the way he grabbed Kit and manacled him not long ago one would not think he had lost a very large slice."

"Tell me," cried the plotter.

Black Barry proceeded and gave an account of Sam Sharpe's tussle with the convict not far from the very room they were occupying at that moment, and Tully Trenck listened like a man amazed.

He believed he could trust Barry again. If not, why had he taken pains to tell him all this and to say that he did not approve of Kit's methods of blackmail?

"Where is Kit?" asked the New York nabob.

Barry shook his head.

"I can't say where he is, but he's setting a trap for Phil Fox and his spy."

"A trap that will fail like the other did?"

"He says it will not. Kit knows that he must win this time or lose all. The sleuth is drawing the lines. We saw him and his man come from the office together, and you know what that means."

Tully Trenck made no reply.

"Do you know that he had Irene in his toils a short time ago?"

The listener fell back aghast.

"My God! no!" he exclaimed. "It is not possible, Barry."

"It is more than possible, because it is true," was the response.

"What did he do with her?"

"Made her put her name to a paper."

"No!"

"Fact it is."

"Who told you?"

"Kit."

"Where did he get the news?"

"From Irene herself."

"What! does she know Kit Kline?"

A smile instantly appeared at Black Barry's lips. He could not but think what a dupe the heartless woman had made of Tully Trenck.

"Irene knows him slightly," he said, with a gesture of dismissal, for he did not deem it proper to reveal the relations which existed between the woman and the convict. "Yes, Phil had Irene in a corner, and she signed some kind of a paper just to get rid of him."

"Do you know the purport of the document?"

Barry shook his head.

"Whatever it was, I think you ought to have it, Mr. Trenck," the city sharp continued. "If this kind of thing keeps up a little while longer, I'm going away."

"Don't desert me now," cried Tully Trenck, and for a moment there was pleading in his eyes as he put his hand across the table and closed slightly on his companion's wrist. "You know enough to be of valuable assistance to me. I have money enough to pay well the man who serves me faithfully, and I will deal it out to him without stint. Kit Kline has shown the

cloven hoof, but if he catches the Broadway spotter in his trap, all right. We'll thank him secretly—nothing more. I've had my last dealings with the man. I found him out when I saw him last. He wanted more money than I had at command."

"Did, eh?"

"Yes; one hundred thousand dollars."

"It was blood-letting by wholesale."

"So I told him."

Before Barry could venture another remark a singular rap sounded at the door, and he crossed the room.

"It is Mag, I guess," said he, as he slipped back the bolt and opened the door.

The next moment the convict's pard uttered an exclamation of surprise which almost immediately found an echo on Tully Trenck's tongue, for the man who entered the room was—Kit Kline the convict!

There was a grim smile of discovery and delight on the felon's face, and he seemed to take delight in glaring at Tully Trenck, from whose cheeks his appearance had chased every vestige of color.

"This is pleasure unexpected," smiled Kit anew as he came forward and poured out a glass of claret, without the shadow of an invitation.

The two men watched him as he gulped it down, Tully Trenck inwardly wishing that the wine were poison, and when Kit set the glass down with emphasis, they held their breath for him to speak.

"I've run the gantlet, you see," he laughed, glancing at Barry. "Mag didn't get sight of me as I came up, else I would have felt her throat-twisters again. The Amazon doesn't dream I'm here, and she needn't find it out. Well, gentlemen, the deuce's to pay."

The manner with which Kit gave utterance to these words, gave Tully Trenck another start.

As the convict spoke, he placed both hands on the round table and leaned toward the nabob of the three.

"You don't trust Kit any more, I see," he went on, giving Trenck look for look. "You bribe a fool sleuth to take him on an old hand-bill."

"I?" ejaculated Tully Trenck.

"You!" hissed the coloring convict. "Didn't you know that Baldimore Bryce is afraid to arrest anybody, for while he plays detective, he has a past no better than some of ours. Why, he wouldn't lay hands on me for all the money you've got your fingers on, Tully Trenck. Why didn't you go to the man who really wants me—to Philip Fox, the gentleman spotter of New York? But this is not what I came here to talk about."

Kit Kline paused for breath.

He had sent a thrill through the man who sat before him.

"When I said the deuce's to pay, I mean that I've failed to catch the man I set my trap for."

"So Barry has just explained," remarked Tully Trenck.

"It's not the old attempt—not the cellar dungeon," answered Kit, with another glance at his companion. "I made another attempt since sundown. I tried the old game—I knew of none better. I made an ambush in his office—like the one I made for Sam, his spy. This time the sleuth himself came in. I went at him with all the vim of a tiger, but, great Caesar! I was sent against the wall with the force of a tornado, and I knocked a picture down, to see on the white plastering behind it my name written in blood! I now know how Sam Sharpe got his brains back," and Kit raised his finger to keep his hearers still. "He wrote my name on the wall for evidence, the last thing he did that night; but never mind that. I could not finish the detective. He has the strength of a Hercules. But I did the next best thing. I got away myself."

Kit Kline poured out the remaining contents of the bottle as he concluded, and swallowed the wine with mad eagerness.

He was putting the glass down, when the click of a lock struck the ears of all.

Kit whirled and fixed his eyes on the door.

He did not know who would come in.

A moment more the Amazonian figure of Mag Manacle appeared in the light.

"Gentlemen, I'm forced to disturb you," said she, coming forward. "Two of you can go out by the usual route, but one must follow the secret passage. His future demands it."

Mag looked at Kit as she spoke.

"You, sir, must go the secret way. The hounds are at your heels," she went on, addressing the convict, and while she spoke her hand closed on his arm. "Never mind what's between us. You know you were not to come back here. You have disobeyed orders; you have brought the trail-dogs to my establishment. Now, you must go."

She led Kit across the room, without giving him time to reply, and opened the door leading to the dark passage once used by Leon.

"Down!" she went on. "Go to the end, and knock above your head. Good-night!"

Kit heard the door shut, and found himself in raven darkness.

"I didn't expect a turn of this kind from

Mag," he chuckled to himself, and then he began to follow the tunnel.

Five minutes the convict found himself at the end of the underground run.

He listened, but not a sound could he hear.

"I was told to knock overhead," he observed, and then he found a floor above him, and applied his knuckles.

In a second a trap-door was opened, and he saw a flood of light.

At the same time two hands swooped down and seized his shoulders.

Then Kit found himself gazing into two revolvers, back of which were the faces of Phil Fox and Sam Sharpe!

CHAPTER XXXIX.

CLOSED.

"THE tigress did not forget!" grated the man of six prisons as he was pulled up into the light by the two men whose revolvers still covered him. "When Mag Manacle told me never to set foot in her den again she meant that she would betray me if I came. This is her day—this the second grip of hers that I've felt. The other one was bestowed in the Joliet Prison. I shall live for revenge, my vulture; I shall endure with patience till I can strike."

Kit was conducted manacled and sullen from the house in which he found himself after having been drawn from the narrow tunnel through which Mag had sent him to the men who wanted him.

Thence to prison.

"They shall hear from me," thought the convict. "Phil Fox has closed in with all his shrewdness. It was a long game and for big stakes. I think it is over now. We will see whether Tully Trenck will keep the stakes he raked across the table through Barry and me. But what will they do with me? Send me back to Joliet where I am wanted for eight years? Perhaps. After that, what? Oh, that's too long a look ahead!" And the fellow laughed to himself. "Of course they'll close in on Tully Trenck and Irene—ah! my wife Irene. Bah! Then they'll find the girl Aida to whom the big stakes belonged all the time. I'll have company here before night or I don't know the man who having played fox all along has within the last few hours played tiger. I wish I had put more power into my attack at the office. I might have—Fool! the milk is on the ground. No tears, Diamond Dunn!"

Tully Trenck and Black Barry quitted the house by the private way by which they had entered it.

They believed that Kit would manage to elude the hunter by means of the secret tunnel, for neither of them suspected that Mag was throwing him into the clutches of the law—paying him back for his insolence.

At the mansion Tully Trenck discovered that Irene had not been back during his absence.

If he had known that she was the convict's wife—if Barry had told all over the little round table at Mag's—he might have guessed the cause of her continued absence, but not knowing all, he could not guess.

"To-morrow Barry and I will strike together," he mused in his library. "We won't tie ourselves to Kit the traitor and blackmailer any longer. If he shows his teeth, why we'll set the trail dogs on him. By Jove! I'm glad Baldimore Bryce did not take me at my word and take Barry in. With him to carry out the plans we'll hold the ground to the end. Mora knows her orders at 'the cage.' The bird is not to get out. What I have I hold—to the bitter end! I haven't played a big game like this for nothing! I haven't put my hands where few men dare to put theirs for a little stake. No! I've won a million, and, by cool, desperate playing."

As the hours wore on Tully Trenck thought more and more of Irene.

Why did she not come?

At length—it was past midnight and the great arteries of New York no longer throbbed with the rush of the human tide—he rushed from his library and went to his private bedroom where he put on the disguise by which he had been distinguished as Riley Dwyer and went out.

He went almost straight to the house where he had left Aida in charge of the woman called Mora—the large woman who looked like she stood ready to do anything for money.

He did not ring the bell, but took a key from his pocket and slipped inside.

The dim light burning in the hall seemed to add to the silence that met him.

He glided up-stairs, and knocked gently at first on a door near the top of the flight.

No answer.

He knocked again, a little louder than before, and with increasing nervousness.

Then he put his lips to the keyhole, and called: "Mora? Mora? MORA?"

The only sound that answered back was the echo of his own words.

"Is the cage empty?" cried Tully Trenck.

"Have the hunters scented Aida out?"

He fell back and rushed to another door.

Twisting the knob with the air of a madman, he uttered a cry, for the door opened and he almost fell into Aida's room, now empty.

The scene almost staggered the plotter of New York.

He seemed to gasp for breath, as if the air of the apartment was suffocating.

"I must find Barry now!" he exclaimed. "He said he was going down to the old quarters—No. 1001. We must consult for a return blow. It is not too late to get the upper hand of the sleuth and his spy."

A few minutes before these events, though Tully Trenck knew it not, two men were advancing upon the same house.

"Now are we on the home stretch, Sam," observed one of the pair to his companion. "We won't have Kit to play his last fierce hand over at the house on Z—street, and we may not find Barry there. But never mind. We'll pick up a link of some kind under the roof. It has been a long chase, now through darkness now through light; but nearly always through the dark."

The person who heard these words looked up into the speaker's face and gave him a smile of triumph, but did not reply.

"With Aida out of the toils and telling Leon all her adventures—with the thug of the game behind the bars and with Musgrave's true will in our hands—don't you think we are out of the woods, Sam?"

The man addressed nodded and smiled.

Ten minutes more the two men had let themselves into a house above whose front door was the number 1001. Sam Sharpe carried a cocked revolver in his right hand; his companion, Phil Fox, had none.

They felt their way down the hall to a door.

The Broadway sleuth touched and turned the knob; the door opened.

The men entered a room and walked forward till the detective's foot struck some object on the floor.

"A match, Sam!" he exclaimed.

In a second the flame of a lucifer burst forth, and then a cry burst simultaneously from the throats of both the hunters. Before them lay the body of Irene, the convict's wife, her features set and ghastly, and a piece of paper clutched in one of her hands!

"Another of the threads of the skein run out," remarked Phil Fox, and then he bent back the icy fingers, and robbed them of their prize.

"Look! read before your match goes out!" cried he, handing the paper to Sam.

And Sam Sharpe read the following lines:

"To the world:—

"The game is nearly out. I can see to the end. I never intend to have thrown in my teeth that I am the wife of the convict of six prisons—Diamond Dunn. I am the person who shortened Monckton Musgrave's life, at the instigation and for the money of Tully Trenck. He was poisoned with a powder which Tully Trenck placed in my hands for that purpose. I use the powder on myself now. When I discovered that 'Ralph Ringgold,' who visited Musgrave before his death, was Philip Fox, the sleuth, I gave up the fight; but *they* made me fight on. May the vengeance of justice overtake the men who have driven to this end a woman who might have taken a different path. The true will makes Aida Armstrong the sole heir to the million; the one that enriched Tully Trenck is a forgery!"

"IRENE NIMS."

The light went out as Sam got to the bottom, and just as a door was heard to shut.

The two men sprung up and waited.

All at once a footstep sounded on their ears, and then Sam the Silent seized a man who looked into the room.

Following the catch came the metallic sound of closing manacles and a cry of horror.

Another match revealed the horrified countenance of Tully Trenck!

It is three months later.

Phil Fox, the Broadway detective, enters his office and throws upon the table an envelope torn at one end. It falls at the elbow of a man who is enjoying a cigar. Sam Sharpe picks the packet up and takes out a dispatch which he quickly masters with his keen eyes, for it is brief and as follows:

"SING SING PRISON, Sept. 10, 188—.

"To CAPTAIN PHILIP FOX:—

"The life prisoner, Tully Trenck, has just suicided in his cell by opening an artery. He left no confession and no writing at all save these words, penciled on the wall:

"I played for a million and lost it and my life."

"That concludes the game," smiled the detective.

Sam shook his head and picked up a pencil:

"No! you forget," he wrote. "There is the wedding to-morrow."

"Aida and Leon, eh, Sam? I haven't forgotten it. Well, it ends the great play for a million rather pleasantly after all. With Barry 'up the river,' and Kit Kline, *alias* Diamond Dunn, back in his old quarters—it's a pity we couldn't hang the rascal—we rest the case. The old janitor in the Trust Company building won't get to tell his secret, for we don't need it. Your speech is going to come back to you, the doctors say."

Sam nodded and dashed off with the pencil:

"Yes, but I'm ready for another big mystery anyway."

THE END.

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